

Years Can Be Assets in a Job Hunt

By [ANDREA COOMBES](#)

Hunting for a job is never easy, but it can be even harder when your hair goes gray.

After a rejection or three, it often becomes difficult to go to another interview without the worrisome feeling that stereotypes are working against you. But it's just that attitude that may torpedo your chances of landing a job.

"If you have an expectation that there will be age bias, you will probably find it," says Marci Alboher, a senior fellow with Civic Ventures, a research group that advocates for people starting second careers.

The trick, Ms. Alboher says, is to confront biases head-on by laying to rest common stereotypes. Take the stereotype that older workers aren't technologically adept. If you know how to use some of the latest tools in your industry, be prepared to talk about that so you can walk into the interview feeling confident and in charge.

"You'll be able to rebut the presumption," Ms. Alboher says.

Got a lot of experience? "Make that a gimme," says Eileen Habelow, senior vice president of organizational development at Randstad, a staffing and recruiting firm. She says job seekers should talk to prospective employers in terms of, "I can definitely do what you need me to do. Here are all the things I can do because of my years of experience."

Also talk about the problems you've solved. "Emphasize the value of that experience bank," Ms. Habelow says.

Longer Without a Job

The unemployment rate for workers 55 and older in October was 7%, far below the 10.2% for workers overall. But a significant portion of older job seekers stay unemployed longer.

In October, about 46% of unemployed workers age 55 and older had been looking for work for 27 weeks or more, compared with 38% of those ages 25 to 34, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

And, certainly, age bias exists -- and the economic downturn appears to be exacerbating it. The number of employment-based age-discrimination claims filed rose 29% in fiscal year 2008 from 2007, according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

But there are ways to improve your chances of landing a job, regardless of your age, in these still-uncertain times. Here are some suggestions:

Taking Action

Get someone to recommend you. On social-networking sites like Facebook, look for people you know who may know someone in the company, then ask for a personal referral. Pick up the phone to make the request -- don't send an email.

Create an online brand. Create profiles on social-networking sites, says Marva Goldsmith, president of Marva Goldsmith & Associates, a career-advice company. Make sure to detail your industry-relevant skills and experience. And include a link to your online profile on your résumé.

In addition, make connections with others and set yourself apart as an expert in your field by participating in industry-specific groups on these sites, Ms. Goldsmith says. For example, a computer-security pro might join some of LinkedIn's "information security" groups.

Confront the stereotypes. In your cover letter or résumé, say you're "very adaptable to changing corporate policies and direction," says Rick Saia, certified professional résumé writer at Pongo Resume, a job-search advice site. And "be ready to talk about previous situations where things changed at work and you adapted easily."

If your salary is higher than a younger worker's, explain how you'll be cheaper to train because of your experience.

Another stereotype: Older workers are on the verge of retirement. If you're ready to work another decade, say so during an interview.

Create a skills-based résumé. Focus on your skills and knowledge relevant to the job at hand. "There's less and less emphasis on chronological résumés," says Samuel Greengard, author of "The AARP Crash Course in Finding the Work You Love."

And don't spill your guts about your entire career. You should focus on the last 10 to 15 years -- unless experience from early in your career relates to the job for which you're applying.

Raise your knowledge quotient. "It's about making yourself the most irresistible, attractive candidate you can be," Mr. Greengard says. Take classes specific to your field. Attend workshops and conferences. Ask younger people in the field what the hot issues are.

Make your story stand out. Seeking a teaching position? Your cover letter could begin with: "The demand for dedicated teachers has never been greater. America's future requires experienced professionals," Mr. Greengard says.

Clarify your goals. If you don't want to move up the ladder, say "I can bring you leadership experience but I don't need a leadership position," Ms. Habelow says. Add that you would like to mentor younger colleagues.

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