

Job-Hunting at 50+

There has never been a successful US age discrimination in hiring lawsuit. In any one case it is virtually impossible to prove that the discrimination was based on age as there are so many subjective factors at play. Yet, the patterns are consistent. Older people take longer to find a job. Often, when they do it is at a lower level than their previous job at a higher incidence than younger people. Someone at 50 may not find it much more difficult than someone at 45, but a 60 year old may find it very difficult indeed. Most of the resistance to hiring older executives comes from preconceptions about older people. The challenge is to address these, particularly when you cannot even get a dialog going. Among these preconceptions are:

1. Older executives are inflexible – often not true, more people over 50 are entrepreneurs than those under 50. These include such well known people as John Sterling, who founded University of Phoenix at 65, and Colonel Sanders who was 65 when he started KFC.
2. Older executives are technologically backward – make sure you can prove otherwise. Many older executives are on LinkedIn, Twitter, write a blog and maintain a website.
3. Older executives are only taking the job for few years until they retire – with the average tenure of many executives being a couple of years, someone who intends to hold a job from 5-10 years is a long-term employee.
4. Older workers lack energy and have health problems – far less true than a generation ago, but one you have to disprove in your case. Make sure you are not overweight, are agile, men should not have graying facial hair – perception is reality.

Of course, it is all very well to understand the preconceptions which handicap older job seekers, but that does not help if you never get a chance to address them. It also does not help to rail against the unfairness of it all. It is even more important for older job-seekers to network their way into a job. For younger job seekers, a resume may be enough to get an interview, but for those who are not, you have to demonstrate that you do not suffer from the assumed characteristics which are used so screen them out. These are usually ones which a resume is not good at addressing. The fact that you are vigorous, slim, athletic, energetic, dynamic, technologically adept, is only really understood by having someone know you. This means that they have to know you before they see your resume.

Now it may not be easy to get to know senior executives and CEOs, but even knowing their friends and colleagues can help. In person meetings are always best, but telephone calls, networking groups, and online networking can help to make them happen. If you are using a connection on LinkedIn, use the phone to supplement email contact. The more of a “multi-channel” approach you take, the better it will be.

While it is more difficult for job-seekers over 50, many land jobs every day. It may take longer, require more ingenuity, but there are people over 65 who successfully land.