

## ***Jobs for Grownups***

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Without condoning ageism, we need to admit one uncomfortable truth: Older job seekers often make it too easy for companies to reject them.

True, job seekers over 40 often face discrimination and may confront hurdles getting an interview that younger applicants do not. But before putting the spotlight on others, let's examine ourselves, the over-40 job seekers.

Start with the résumé. Résumés of older workers tend to be a lengthy recitation of job descriptions and accomplishments, impressively demonstrating an ever-increasing level of responsibility and compensation. As such, they are probably the least persuasive documents you could show a human resources manager.

### **Rule No. 1: Job seekers over 40 need a résumé that looks forward, not backward**

As a younger job seeker, you needed to emphasize experience. By midcareer, however, the focus of your résumé should change. Place all of your accomplishments and experience in the context of *future* service. A résumé shouldn't read like the testimonial at your retirement dinner.

I recently received a résumé from a 47-year-old finance executive. It painstakingly documented a career of prominent positions at top financial services firms. He was clearly a smart, trusted worker for many years, yet he wrote to tell me that his résumé was being ignored by hundreds of companies.

Beware of writing a résumé that generates awe but not interviews. Your résumé should persuade a potential employer to grant you an interview, not your old employer to give you a gold watch.

Change the perspective from "look at everything I have done," to "look at everything I can do for you." For example: "Experienced salesman with long track record of success," becomes, "Learned x, y and z about selling and developed broad network of sales contacts sure to be enormously valuable in future sales positions."

Take the time and effort to tailor your résumé to each job you apply to, so the particulars of the job are addressed in the context of your prior experience. (Doing this in the cover letter alone is inadequate. Many HR managers won't even look at the cover letter once they see the "gold watch" résumé.)

Your résumé must demonstrate how you will put your experience and skills to work for your new employer, not how much time and energy you exerted in the past for someone else. Try it, and compare it with your old résumé. Which résumé is more likely to generate an interview?

### **Rule No. 2: Don't be defensive, and don't omit dates**

Fear of age discrimination leads many job seekers over 40 to take graduation and employment dates off their résumé. Bad idea. HR managers know all about this strategy. It's like saying "I am concerned about my age" in bold letters across your résumé. That won't lead to many interviews.

Put all relevant dates and jobs on your résumé, but tell your story energetically. Demonstrate that you can work productively for the next five, 10 or 20 years. Be positive and enthusiastic about the future, not defensive and deceitful about the past. Your chances of success should increase dramatically.

I just received a résumé from a 49-year-old sales professional who wrote that she never misses work and always stays up-to-date on the latest technology. This is far more powerful than trying to hide that she graduated college in 1978. Don't waste a good opportunity by defensively obscuring the truth. Instead,

rewrite your résumé to emphasize your skills, your vitality and your commitment to doing a great job. Some lucky employer will be smart enough to notice.

**Rule No. 3: Don't be afraid to sell yourself**

Too many candidates confuse sending résumé with buying a lottery ticket. Merely sending out twice as many résumé doesn't make you twice as likely to win a job. Make your own luck by applying to half as many jobs, but following up twice as often--in creative, relevant ways that will help establish your qualifications for the job and your ability to learn new skills.

Forget the standard "I'm calling to make sure you received my résumé" line. By itself, it's rarely helpful, and many HR managers seem annoyed by it.

Find ways to demonstrate your skills, not your frustrations about your job search.

Applying for a sales or marketing position? Use your experience in order to sell yourself. Create a Web page showing why this employer should "purchase" you. Offer a free promotional campaign (i.e., work for free on a trial basis or be paid on a temp basis).

Create data points so that an HR manager can evaluate your work habits and not just your year of graduation. Your revised résumé radiates with energy; now back it up with action. Leave a message that you will call back on Tuesday at 11:15 and then make sure you do it. Make other promises and deliver on them. If you wait for the interview to impress the recruiter, your chance may never come.