
Avoiding the “Too Old” Stigma in Your Executive Job Search

By Abby Locke

It has to be startling news to an executive jobseeker to learn that age discrimination activities can creep into your career as early as the age of 40. Although there are employment laws to protect jobseekers who are 40+, age discrimination practices in your career development and employment procedures still occur more often than not.

Here are some real, proven strategies that you can apply in your executive job search campaign.

Renew Your Mind.

Have you ever considered that you could be the one sabotaging your own job search progress? Have you embraced an attitude of defeat that is visible in interviews and networking events? Avoid being the first person to bring up age concerns in any of your verbal and written communications – don’t eliminate yourself from the race by talking about “many, many years ago” or “back in my day” when dealing with a potential contact.

Recognize that your age, breadth of experience, and wisdom are valuable assets that any employer can use. Be prepared to discuss and give actual examples from your career that demonstrate strategic leadership, problem-solving capabilities, and staff leadership. Count your age as an asset not a liability.

Develop and Communicate Your Personal Brand.

Don’t let the main focus or selling points of your executive job search campaign be centered on fighting age discrimination myths. Work closely with a personal brand coach to explore, identify, develop, and communicate your personal brand. Having a solid understanding of your personal brand will help you streamline all aspects of your job search activities. With a strong personal brand, you can confidently discuss your unique value proposition and the contributions you can bring to an employer.

Maximize the use of your personal brand statement – include it as part of your executive profile on a resume; revise it to create your attention-getting 30-second elevator pitch; expand upon it through career success stories in an interview; and communicate it frequently to others in networking events.

For example, this is a personal brand statement revised into an elevator pitch.

I am a senior communications manager who has influenced key decision makers at Fortune 500 companies to employ strategies that protected their corporate reputation and positively shaped consumer perception about their product and services.

Create A Stand-Out Resume.

When battling perceptions about age discrimination, you have to be very strategic about your resume development process. Focus on developing an executive resume that positions you as a valuable partner to a company’s success right from the beginning. Here are a few techniques to keep in mind:

- Write a powerful executive summary profile that includes your top career achievements.

- Do not list every job in your career, especially those going back to the 1960's.
- Avoid listing outdated job titles and office equipment.
- Emphasize current technology training and computer skills.
- Capture early career experiences and performance highlights in an overview paragraph that lists positions and company names without the dates.

Be Technologically Savvy.

You cannot escape the growing impact of technology in every area of your life, especially in the workplace. A common, overused perception about experienced “older” professionals is that they lack adequate technical skills and are uncomfortable with new technology. Address these concerns by enrolling in classes with a local community college or through professional associations to increase your technical proficiency. Overall, do your best to stay current on new technology programs as they relate to email, Internet research, word processing, and spreadsheet programs.

Make the Connection in the Interview.

Research the company to understand their needs and long-term business objectives and how your talents and skills fit in. During the interview process, demonstrate the synergies between what you have to offer and the position qualifications that the company is seeking. Use this as a tactic to steer unnecessary attention away from age issues.

Consistently draw attention to the value and benefits you bring to an employer (through concrete examples from your career) and show how you influence organizations and play a pivotal role in their long-term growth and success. For example:

As a human resource executive, I have repeatedly created employee relation and incentive programs that have reduced employee turnover by more than 20%.

Last, but certainly not least, learn effective networking strategies that will support and benefit you throughout your job search process. Reach out to others for advice and feedback through alumni connections, industry associations, former employers and coworkers, and close family and friends. In addition, seek out support groups that specifically deal with executives in a specific age group.

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