

Older job applicants need to break out of the stereotypes

Liz Reyer, Coach's Corner--April 20, 2009

The Client

Name: Allen

Age: 57

Title: Project manager

Industry: Manufacturing

Issue: Age as factor in job search

Q. I was laid off early this year and have been looking hard for a job since then. I've gotten some interviews, but no offers. I'm older, and I'm concerned that my age is working against me. Any advice?

A. Whether or not age is a factor, present yourself in a way that subtly challenges the stereotypes of older employees.

The inner game

Control your attitude. Develop a perspective of confidence and patience. If you feel beaten down, remind yourself of the assets you bring while not going overboard into arrogance. Avoid the "I know more than these youngsters" attitude trap, which would show in interviews. Be patient, and trust that things will work out. You don't control all aspects anyway, so relaxing will help you interview well and feel better. Try meditation, exercise, or other activities that keep you grounded.

See yourself as others see you. Start with your appearance. Be sure you look up to date and that your grooming is impeccable. Look at intangibles like energy level and interaction skills. Your goal is to give the impression of someone who'd be easy to work with, regardless of age. Don't rely on your own opinion; ask others for feedback, too.

Analyze your skills. Understand your strengths, your gaps, and how you talk about them. If there are areas where you're out of date, learn new skills or seek positions that don't require them. Read job descriptions and current articles about your field. Reflect the language you encounter in your résumé and interview responses. You'll sound current and inspire confidence.

The outer game

Revise your résumé. Include enough information, but not an overwhelming amount. If your background includes experiences not relevant to the position you're pursuing, leave it off. Shorten your work history, dropping positions in the beginning of your career. Remove dates from your education section.

Practice interviewing. It's a skill that warrants practice; otherwise, you're getting your practice when the stakes are high. Here are some tips. Search online for "job interview questions" to get a list of sample questions. Outline answers and rehearse them out loud. Then get a friend, family member, or job coach to conduct mock interviews. It may feel awkward, but it'll help when you have an interview.

Update your approach. Get on board with online networking, such as LinkedIn. It's an effective way to track down former associates who may have leads or find the right people to talk to in companies you're interested in. Develop a text only résumé for online applications. You'll want to tweak it for each job, but it's easier if you start with a good template.

Be realistic about salary. Money is short in many firms, so you may need to accept less than you were paid before, no matter your age.

Be connected. Some of that is networking; the more people know you're looking, the more help you'll get. Another important part is getting support. In a tough job search, people make the difference in staying motivated.

The last word

Take a fresh look at yourself and your approach to the job search; that'll help you succeed in the job market.