

Don't Give Away Your Next Job – The 10 Biggest Age Related Mistakes that the Experienced Job Seeker Makes

You are an experienced worker looking for a job. Let's face it; the deck is stacked against you before you even start. Employers are looking for younger, cheaper, more agile, less established, etc. We know all the terminology used to screen us out. Those are things we can not help. However, this report will give you tips to avoid 10 frequently made mistakes that, we the experienced job seekers often make, mistakes that will quickly take us out of the running for a job, often before we even get the chance to compete.

The Big Mistake We Make Before We Even Get Started:

1. **Not Understanding the Obstacles We Now Face** – We don't want to sound overly pessimistic just as we are getting started, but we must understand that as experienced veteran job seekers, we are not the prime candidates for jobs that we once were. More than ever companies are concerned with costs, costs and only costs, resulting in values that we cherish like quality, service and even at times, integrity becoming only secondary considerations. Job skills have become more generic and interchangeable than ever. We are competing against folks who are perceived as cheaper, and more flexible and easier to manage than we are. This is the reality we face. Not understanding this is the first and biggest mistake we can make. Not making any of the other mistakes in this report will help us level the playing field, and give us the chance to compete. We can then focus in the areas where we experienced workers generally excel, such as business knowledge, ability to produce under pressure, sound judgment, ethics, loyalty and great work habits.

Mistakes We Make While Job Searching:

2. **Not using the contacts that you have built up over the years** – You have many years of work experience, you have worked with many people over those years. If you are like the rest of us, most of those former colleagues probably liked you as a person, and respected your work skills. Now that you are looking for work, swallow your pride, bite the bullet, and call or contact them. Not only will they be happy to hear from you, but if they are working, it may be at a company that appreciates experienced workers, and there may be an opening. Also, by contacting former colleagues, you will get the benefit of their network, which you can use to help you expand yours. Remember, though, if you contact someone at work, be respectful of their time and keep it short.

3. Not understanding that the techniques that you used to get your last job no longer works today – Technology has created fundamental changes in the employment search world. Old tools no longer work. You must understand this. Things you did in the past, even as recently as ten years ago are now useless. Very few jobs are posted in the classified section of the newspaper. Mailing in your resume to a company only results in it being filed in the trash, as all resumes are collected electronically and scanned. No one reads them, unless they have passed through the electronic scanner. Another old standby, mass mailing (or mass faxing) of resumes is just as fruitless. Companies are relying less and less on recruiters, in the never ending battle to reduce costs. Networking is even more important than ever, but it needs to be done properly.

4. Letting your resume date you – You have been in the work force for 30 plus years now. Companies value that experience. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Never list your entire work history on your resume. Only go back 15 years or so, adjusted by a year or two, if you had a job switch in that timeframe. Along the same lines, don't list the dates of college degrees and awards, at all, for fear of dating you. Also listing recent dates and omitting older ones puts up a red flag that you are trying to hide something. Finally, don't list skills in your resume that would date you, unless the job calls for that specific skill. No one cares that you can take 120 words of shorthand per minute or that you can write code in IBM assembler language. Those skills only signal the potential employer that you are experienced worker focusing on extinct skills.

Mistakes We Make During the Interview Process:

5. Not appearing age appropriate for the interview – You have heard for many years that it is important to dress appropriately for interviews. This is corollary to that adage that many experienced workers don't follow, usually because of their zeal to appear younger. You have grey hair, you have a few wrinkles, and you have put on a few pounds. Those are inevitable. Arriving at an interview with shoe polish black hair, tons of make up, a suit or dress you appropriate for a teenager, only makes you look like an old fart trying too hard to look young. Your dress and makeup must be appropriate for the interview. **Hint** - If you are not sure about your appearance, get a friend who always tells you the unvarnished truth to check you out before you leave.

6. Talking about skills in the interview no longer relevant – As experienced workers, each one of us has done things that are no longer relevant to the current work environment. Each has skills such as, working a PBX, COBOL programming language, using a 10-key adding machines, etc. Unless you are specifically interviewing with someone looking for these skills, never, ever, talk about them in an interview. Doing so tells your potential employer that you are not current; you are still living in the past. Always focus on the skills the employer is looking for, and explain how your work experience enhances those skills. **Hint** - if you have a 10 year old cell phone that works great, leave it in the car, but if you have a new model Blackberry or iPhone, it may be beneficial to let your interviewer accidentally see as you confirm your calendar.

7. Talking about your health in an interview – Experienced workers do cost a company more in health benefit costs, and costs drive businesses. While it is illegal in an interview to be asked directly about your health, companies have subtle ways of probing that information. A frequently asked question is “what do you like to do in your spare time” or “what are your hobbies”. If you get that type of question, try to include something that lets them know you are health conscious and active, such as hiking, biking, walking, golf, etc. Also, if asked about a gap in your resume, which may have been caused by illness, just say “I took some time off for personal reasons”. Never, ever say “I had cancer” or “I had a heart attack” or openly volunteer that you have or have had any medical condition. It will set off a red flag in the eyes of the interviewer, and you should be prepared the polite rejection.

8. Not making your interviewers comfortable that you can work with them – You walk into an interview, and the interviewer is 20 or 30 years younger than you are. Just think what is going through the interviewer’s mind. If you are lucky, you remind him of Mrs. Smith, the second grade teacher who made life miserable, or uncle Charley, who never closed his mouth. At worst, he sizes you up as an immediate threat, someone that is after his job. This is particularly true if you are dealing with someone without significant management experience. You must make the interviewer feel comfortable that you can work with them. Sports, pets and hobbies are good, non-controversial topics that everyone can talk about and establish rapport. More importantly, let the interviewer know that you are not after his job, and that your only goal in life is to make him look good. Be sure that you bring in your experiences in working with diverse people. Remember, no matter how good your skills are, unless the interviewer is comfortable that he can work with you, you will not get hired.

9. Talking about negative experiences at previous employers – The longer we have been in the workforce, the more negative experiences we have had. There is no way around that fact. No matter how bad, or even how relevant, keep them out of the interview. If you are asked why you left a job, and the true answer is that the boss was such a jerk, and that you could not work for him, never, ever allow that to get into the interview. Always answer with something positive – “I left to take a better offer”, “I wanted to spend some time working on my book, or my boat”, etc. Remember if you come across negative about your previous work, the interviewer will always assume that you sooner or later will feel the same way about the company you are interviewing with.

Mistake Made During the Salary & Negotiation Process:

10. Having unrealistic salary expectations – For many reasons, salaries are generally shrinking. Often, as an experienced worker, you may be applying for a job that is a notch or two down in title and responsibility from previous jobs. When it comes to salary negotiations, do your research and ask for what the job is worth, not what you have made in the past, or what you would like to make. If this is a position you would love, at a company you respect, be flexible.