

BOOM: How to get hired when you're old, and why companies should hire baby boomers

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Most job interviews start with the "tell me everything" question. The toughest candidates to interview are those who answer with some version of, "Well, I'm over 50 now." Sometimes, the words come out apologetically; sometimes, they have an undertone of, "I dare you to continue this conversation." Often, they are used as an explanation for why someone hasn't found work after a layoff, restructuring or recession. The "over fifty" reference is, indeed, a red flag for me in hiring.

But not because of the person's age.

I cringe when I hear this kind of comment because it's an excuse. So, you're mature in your years. Can you change that? No? So, are you blaming your bad fortune on something you cannot control? Yes? In my business, things go wrong sometimes. Are you going to start pointing fingers the minute an obstacle appears? Or are you an innovative problem solver? If you're an excuse maker, I won't hire you whether you are fifteen or fifty. I'm looking for solution-finders.

If you are a solution-finder, you've already thought about the things I'm going to say next. If not, let me clue you in...

You are not "seasoned" like a piece of meat; you are experienced, knowledgeable, reliable, friendly and open to learning new things.

You are not Colonel Sanders. An HR manager told me, "There are boxes of things at the supermarket and they give men, especially, a youthful appearance." She asked me to pass this fact along. Nothing wrong with a snow-capped dome, but if you're concerned about age being an issue, stop posing as Father Time. Women learned this long ago; there is no stigma in looking fresh, up to date and youthful. Take that thinning head of hair to a stylist and ask for a salt and pepper look. If it gives you confidence and a fresh outlook, why not?

You are not too old to take a walk around the block. People of all fitness levels are successful in their work. But those who can get out for a bit of fresh air and exercise every day tend to score higher on aptitude tests, tend to have better focus and tend to appear to be more capable than those who are starting their fitness plan tomorrow. Job searching is stressful; help yourself survive it (perhaps, literally) by sneaking in a little workout now and then. If you can't do that, try meditating. Clearing your mind of anxieties and mental junk mail will leave you space and energy to succeed in your interviews.

I want to hire dependable, mature individuals. My company can benefit from your experience. You just need to show me that you are ready to step up: to face challenges, to get creative, to work well with others of every generation. If you can do that, you're hired.

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