

## **AGE-PROOFING YOUR JOB APPLICATION**, by Kelly Eggers, Wall Street Journal FINS Channel, August 31, 2011

The comments are from some angry older job seekers. Kelly is just the writer, not the expert; she's quoting experts. Think about these five points Kelly makes. She's right on. Attitudes of recruiters must be addressed by job seekers, too. The commenters are going to be looking a long time *if* their attitudes and behaviors aren't changed. Of course, one way to avoid these problems is not to play the game of "pick the low-hanging fruit off the Internet job tree", but **network** to your next position instead. However, doing so takes time, effort and giving to others. – Ken Soper, MA, MDiv, NCDA-recognized *Master Career Counselor*

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It's not about your age; it's about *how* you present yourself. Many job seekers believe they're not considered for open positions because they are too young or too old. The real reason their resumes wind up at the bottom of the pile has more to do with *how they present* themselves and their industry savvy, say recruiters and hiring managers. Those who present themselves as up-to-date on industry trends and fluent with new technologies will have a leg up, *regardless* of their age. If you are worried that your many years of industry experience -- or your complete lack of it -- will submarine your chances of getting a job, there are things you *can* do to present yourself as a strong candidate, regardless of your age.

**Provide the Right Kind of Contact Information** - Welcome to 2011: It's time to stop advertising the fact that you're still using a fax machine. Providing obsolete or outdated means of getting in touch is a dead giveaway that you're job-seeking in the past. "Many more experienced job seekers won't list their cell phone number, instead including home and work lines," says Jay Meschke, president of Kansas City, Mo.-based EFL Associates, the executive search arm of CBIZ, a professional services company. Simply list your *cell* phone number. The once-ubiquitous need to differentiate between "daytime" and "evening" phone numbers is no longer a concern and makes a job seeker seem harder to reach and out of touch with today's pace of job seeking.

It's also a good idea to ditch the @earthlink.com email address you created back in the 20th century, or the "sweetie\_pie"-esque screenname you've used since high school. "Make sure that you include your e-mail address, and that it's professional," says Penny Locey, a senior consultant with Keystone Associates, a Boston-area management consultancy. A Gmail account gives off a markedly different impression than an AOL or Hotmail account, for example, as does a user name that includes your name or initials and includes only a couple of numbers at the end, if any at all.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, being too "now" with your contact information can indicate that you're new to the workforce. If you're looking for a job that requires you to be fully versed in new media, including your Twitter handle or a unique QR code, a kind of barcode that can be read by a smartphone, can set you apart in a positive way. For more traditional jobs, however, being too high-tech with your contact information can get clunky and confusing, so include it with caution.

**Choose Dates Carefully** - When age-proofing your resume, disguising the true dates of your employment may seem like a tempting solution, but experts say that's likely to draw more negative attention than positive. "If the dates you graduated or worked at a company aren't there, it makes your material appear incomplete," says Bruce Tulgan, CEO of Rainmaker Thinking, a New Haven, Conn.-based management consultancy that focuses on integrating generations in the workplace.

Instead, consider omitting experience older than 15 years, but be careful how you go about doing this. The tactic can make your work history seem shorter, but be sure to avoid including only senior-level positions. "No one begins their career as 'director' or 'senior researcher,'" says Greg Faherty, a New York-area resume writer. "Anyone reading the resume will know you had positions before that, and they'll wonder how far back your career goes."

Regardless of which dates or experience you choose to include, experts say that if you want to sell yourself to a recruiter, don't include a line about your wealth of experience in your summary. "An age giveaway is placing your years of experience in your opening summary or cover letter," says Faherty. "Telling someone you have 30 years of experience...is the worst way to begin your resume." Likewise, younger grads should keep their education section out of the top half of the resume, relegating it to a space after relevant work experience.

**Be Clear, Simple and Achievement Oriented** - When writing out your experience in your resume, choose your words wisely. "A dead giveaway that you're less experienced is when your resume's content is written in sound-bites," says Meschke. While it's not necessarily a bad thing to be short and to the point in a resume, writing that's too short and punchy is likely to point to your age, especially if what you're saying doesn't detail a specific achievement. On the other hand, Meschke says that older job seekers are notorious for using verbose phrases in their resumes, detailing the different tasks they've been responsible for throughout each position they've held. For both more- and less-experienced job seekers, what's written on a resume about experience should be clearly and simply written and should point to true accomplishments, says Meschke.

**Keep It Current** - Avoid being too formal with your language. "Steer clear of old-fashioned terminology that sounds like something you'd read on a wedding invitation," Locey says. Don't end your cover letter with "I look forward to the pleasure of your reply." Be polite and tactful, but avoid cliched, formal phrasing. "It sounds like you copied it out of a book," says Locey -- older and younger job seekers alike need to be more colloquial in their application materials.

Job seekers should also make sure they're using the most current industry terms. "Nothing shows you're more informed than knowing what the industry is calling something these days," says Locey. A few examples: Use "talent acquisition" instead of "recruiting," or "creating executive financial dashboards" as opposed to "financial reporting to executives." The older terms aren't necessarily incorrect, says Locey, but if you're looking to appear current, you may consider including up-to-date terminology. "Buzzwords are what help a resume get pulled," Locey explains. "They make younger workers sound informed and older workers seem more connected to what's going on in the industry right now."

**D**on't Try to Overcompensate - While it's not a bad idea to make your application materials as ageless as possible, it can backfire if you take it too far. The last thing you want to do is catch a potential employer totally off-guard. If the way you've written your resume makes you seem like you're 27 when you're actually 57, that's not going to earn you brownie points. "Older, more experienced people who don't want to seem too old for a young, hip company often make the mistake of trying too hard," Tulgan says. "If you send in a holographic resume and then you show up with grey hair, you still have grey hair."

Be forthright in your cover letter, for example, by saying that while you might seem like an older candidate, you still have a solid understanding of the company and what it takes to improve its bottom line. "Come right out with it," says Randy Merrell, vice president of operations at Elite Network, a San Francisco-based search firm. "Show your potential employer that you're proud of your experience and your 'seasoning.'"

For less-experienced candidates, a little acknowledgment can go a long way. "It frustrates employers when younger, inexperienced people don't appreciate the concept that people have been in the workforce for 20 years, when the applicant was in Kindergarten," says Tulgan. "A younger person is going to be more savvy and mature if they show they understand that context and can admit that while experience certainly matters, they still have skills, insights, wisdom, and can bring a tremendous amount to the table."

## COMMENTS

- What a surprise to discover upon Googling that the author is only 24 or 25. No wonder she imagines the problem is just that old people are so incompetent they don't even know how to write a resume and need to have email and cell phones explained to them. Okay, sure, there are dimwits being born all the time and some do live to become old dimwits, so maybe that's why some older workers have trouble finding work. But that's not the main reason.

### Multiple comments by one responder:

- "It's time to stop advertising the fact that you're still using a fax machine. Providing obsolete or outdated means of getting in touch is a dead giveaway that you're job-seeking in the past." No, it's time for recruiters to start using their brains more. I provide a fax number whenever it's asked for, but the fax I use is internet-based, which sends all faxes to my e-mail. I have a fax because sometimes people (and companies!) want documents sent to them that way, and/or they want to fax something to you. E.g., just last week I applied for a job, and the company required that the resume be faxed or mailed. A few benefits of faxes: simpler for most people (including people in big companies) to do than scanning and e-mailing (read, fewer chances for something to malfunction); you get positive confirmation of delivery; and it's much more secure (e-mails can be intercepted, and if they're stored on computers and servers they can be hacked).
  - "A Gmail account gives off a markedly different impression than an AOL or Hotmail account, for example". I agree, and I use Gmail, but it's foolish to for recruiters to dismiss someone because of it. There could be good reasons someone has retained an Earthlink or AOL address, and there are many people who are highly active in business today who still use them. One person I know of doesn't want to ditch his AOL account simply because so many people he knows have that address.
  - "If the dates you graduated or worked at a company aren't there, it makes your material appear incomplete," Or, it can mean you simply don't know the exact dates. But the computer-based forms are so rigid in their format, you can't enter only year, or a month and a year.
  - "Instead, consider omitting experience older than 15 years, but be careful how you go about doing this." You've got to be kidding. Do you really think that things you did 20 years ago are irrelevant to your knowledge? Things we did when we were younger actually tend to have a deep impression on us.
  - "An age giveaway is placing your years of experience in your opening summary or cover letter," says Faherty. "Telling someone you have 30 years of experience...is the worst way to begin your resume." Bull. You may well have worked your way up from rookie to top level, but all of that was experience in the business. If you say 10 years of experience in \_\_\_ position, it doesn't give a complete picture. What you should write is that you started at position "x" 30 years ago, and worked your way up, with 10 years at the top position.
  - "Likewise, younger grads should keep their education section out of the top half of the resume, relegating it to a space after relevant work experience." Oh, brother. Every computer-based form on the planet puts the education section near the top, and the experience section after that.
  - "Buzzwords are what help a resume get pulled," Fools. Buzzwords can be learned in minutes.
  - If these recruiters (or, sorry, I meant to use the less-meaningful/understandable, and longer "talent acquisition") are typical, then god help us. They are mindless fools.
- If, as the author suggests, you can age proof your application by not going back more than 15 years, you automatically give yourself away as 'old'. All of these empty suggestions are the thoughts of a young person not understanding age discrimination. Does she have any suggestions on gray hair, baldness, wrinkles? [Well presented, you get an interview. **Then**, show/demonstrate your talent! -KS]
  - Kelly Eggers has been out of school ..... two years.
  - All good, however, when you finally arrive at that face-to-face interview ... you can't escape the gray hair. If the prospective employer is age adverse; all the word smithing in the world won't overcome that issue. And yes, there are many who simply will not hire anyone 50 plus (I'm 63 with a graduate degree).
  - I'm afraid that the author is generally correct: you are more likely to be hired if you are inexperienced, less skilled, less competent, superficial and a "hack". "Twitter" and "executive financial dashboards" count for much more than substantial communication and thorough financial reporting. In brief, be stupid and be proud.
  - What makes Kelly Eggers such an "expert" on this subject? Perhaps some of the things she suggests are correct, but in the meantime, I won't hire her to empty the cat box.