

Ask the Career Coach: Age of Wisdom or Discrimination?

How can you avoid age discrimination in your job search when you jump back into the fold?

By [Lisa Chenofsky Singer](#)

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Dear Career Coach Lisa,

I am a seasoned professional seeking new opportunities after being laid off a few years ago. I chose to take some time off and, unfortunately due to the economy, I need to return to work. How can I present myself in the best positive way to avoid age discrimination?

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Short Hills

Age is something to be proud of. Growing older allows for more life and work experiences that when presented well can work to your advantage. If you are applying for positions requiring limited experience then you will probably receive many rejections. It is not illegal to ask age on a job interview contrary to popular belief. It is, however, illegal to reject a candidate based on age. That said, many companies train their staff not to address the age issue during an interview so they limit their liability.

You do need to consider your abilities relative to the marketplace demands and your attitude towards returning to work. On the employer's perspective, there tends to be the assumption that a higher salary demand comes with more experience.

If you are feeling "over the hill" and behave that way, you may invite age discrimination. Feeling comfortable with yourself, your age, your abilities and being able to properly market yourself is the key to being considered for an opportunity. The other key is being referred.

When returning to the job market after some time off, you need to evaluate your skills relative to the marketplace demands. For example if you were in marketing, you might not have tracked along with the shift and influence of social media. If it's the case, then volunteer and get involved with the use of social media and take some classes if you can. Some libraries offer an introduction to the use of social media as well.

If you want to return to the work that you did before, have you stayed connected with former colleagues to understand what has changed in the market since you stepped out? If not, it is time to begin your research on current issues impacting and surrounding your profession. Begin to reconnect with your network—former colleagues, association members, alumni groups. Join in discussions on the web such as LinkedIn Groups, blogs, columnists and news reports in your field so you can quickly get on track with present issues and challenges faced by prospective employers.

If you do not know what you want to do next in your career, think through what skills you have that are transferable to another industry or other positions. Search job boards not by job title but rather do advanced searches on skills and key words. It will bring up jobs you may not have heard of but may be of interest to you.

Career exploration can be exciting. At some point you will need to focus your job search efforts. The best option is to create a job search strategy plan. The plan should include your targeted ideal job and optional positions for consideration with a marketing plan for connecting either with the companies identified or individuals that work in the industries targeted.

About this column: "Ask the Career Coach" is a column dedicated to those who may be in transition or wrestling with a career dilemma by providing a forum for advice. We welcome your questions. Please send them to CareerCoachLisa@gmail.com. Lisa Chenofsky Singer is a Millburn-Short Hills resident and the founder of Chenofsky Singer & Associates LLC. She offers Executive and Career Management Coaching and Human Resources Consulting, writes and speaks on job search and career-related topics. Her web site is www.ChenofskySinger.com.