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Five Magic Words for Older Candidates

by Dean Tracy

Having served as a recruiter and career coach for a number of years, I talk with prospective candidates daily about their qualifications and engage in the development of their strategic search efforts. In our discussions, the candidate will usually make a comment about his age and the suspicion that the target company "is probably looking for someone younger than me."

There seems to be a categorical opinion among the candidates that if they are older than 40, then they are automatically disqualified for the position. With this perspective, they will usually not even submit their résumé.

At the end of the day, the person responsible for the way that your age comes across to the hiring company is you. The five points below serve as a checklist of ways to serve up your age in a way that elevates your personal brand instead of diluting your candidacy.

This way, you can be the champion in your search strategy - not the casualty in this race for the job.

1. Accomplished versus seasoned

Your next employer is looking for someone who is a natural leader and knows the benefits of success, so the way that you market your experience on your résumé must reflect your energy and commitment. To identify yourself as "seasoned" is essentially putting you in the category of a boring condiment on a burger. On the other hand, promoting your background as "accomplished" is defining a level of excellence that the hiring company will want.

Additionally, as you develop your résumé and list your accomplishments, you must be able to brand yourself as an individual who is a "key contributor" to a result instead of someone who "participated" in a specific task.

2. Evidence versus claims

Professional maturity is a critical element when showing your interest in a position. To be considered a suitable candidate to a certain company with their own particular corporate culture, you must be able to demonstrate your capability, drive, and excellence in everything that you do.

You can understand why a young start-up company may want a younger employee because of her energy and tenacity. You must admit that it can be appealing, but your contributions to the company are that of someone who will not panic when there is a decline in production or slump in cash flow. The younger, less-experienced candidate may not be able to embrace the ebbs and flows of the market.

Demonstrate this. Showcase your evidence-based background in your résumé. No claims, just real, tangible feats. A candidate with a high resale value is the one who can communicate clearly while offering real examples of success and methodologies that have guided their career.

3. Polish versus wipe

When you consider the appreciation of your investments, such as your home, you'll agree that there was

a time in which you knew that your older home would still have a high resale value. If you were to put your older home on the market, there are probably some things that you would do in order to increase the curb appeal or possibly upgrade some of the furnishings on the inside. As a candidate, you are no different.

As you observe the younger candidates who may be applying to the same jobs that you are, you'll notice that they take great pride in their appearance. This will often carry over into their perceived work habits, and in an instant, they will have the edge.

If you intend to remain competitive in the selection process, you must be able to recognize that your "professional curb appeal" is especially critical when competing with the younger generation. Have your suit cleaned, not dusted. Have it altered if necessary, and make sure it fits you. Polish your shoes don't just wipe them off. Recognize that you may have to make some upgrades to your wardrobe, and you must dress for the job you want, not the job you have.

4. Aware versus well-versed

Unfortunately, it's not uncommon for candidates from the older generation to have fallen behind the curve when it comes to being current with systems and technology. Staying competitive in today's saturated market means that you must be able to keep up with the trends and tools that are being used in your next company.

You should sign up for classes in your local community college or city offices to become proficient in the applications that are being used in today's market. You may not become an expert in a short period of time, but you will become well-versed in these applications, which will certainly prove instrumental in your search process.

Continuing education and certifications are a big deal. If you are working, then you should consider signing up for periodic evening or Saturday classes.

5. Experience versus age

What's the alternative? Your age is something that you cannot change, but you can control how you choose to use it to your advantage in today's tough job market. We all know that it's not legal for an employer to ask your age in the interview or selection process, but we also know that first impressions can be the game-changer along the way.

Don't let your age be an automatic disqualifier to your next career opportunity. Leverage your age as a way to set the standard of excellence for your new employer. Remind them that you're someone capable of fostering a calming influence while injecting professional maturity into what can sometimes be a very stressful and chaotic environment.

Go get' em!

Dean Tracy is a professional recruiter, public speaker, and career coach based in Northern California with an emphasis on placing and coaching professionals at a national level. He is the Founder of the [National Leadership & Career Management Advisory Group](#) and also serves on the Leadership Team for [Job Connections](#), which is recognized as one of Northern California's largest and most reputable professional networking groups.