



Job Tips for 50+ Workers

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The "Overqualified" Label

"Aren't you overqualified for this position?" That question haunts many job seekers and too often leaves them speechless, unsure what to answer.

Is the "overqualified" question a thin disguise for age bias, or a euphemism for "Are you too old?" Does it mean the interviewer is questioning your goals or commitment? Could the "overqualified" label also mean the questioner is leery about supervising an older worker?

It's not just older workers who get the "overqualified" label, but it is an added burden when you're 50 or older. Take heart, though. You can challenge the charge in three important ways: in your résumé, at the interview, and with your attitude.

Your Résumé

Don't misrepresent yourself, but focus on skills that match the requirements of the job.

Share only those qualifications that match the job opening. Cite recent accomplishments that are relevant to the position.

- The employer may view extensive experience as a drawback, not an asset, for success in the position. Craft your résumé to show how you've used your skills and the results you've produced.
- Many experts suggest limiting your work history to 10 or 15 years. That may mean deleting pages of experience. But you'll end up with a clearer, more targeted résumé.
- List all technical credentials, including recent training and certifications.
- Use your target industry's keywords, especially for technical positions. Include the keywords in your work history and throughout the résumé.

Your Interview

Explain that your top priorities aren't title or money. Emphasize your attitude, skills, and the interests that led you to apply. Don't be defensive, and remember to smile!

The following examples can help you prepare for interview questions and comments that suggest you are overqualified.

"Your salary requirements are high."

- Explain that you believe the employer deserves excellence and experience, and that's what you'll bring. You can hit the ground running with less training time (and expense). Be sure to find out ahead of time whether or not your salary requirements are within the industry range for the position.

“You’ll get bored.”

- Firmly assure the interviewer that you’re dedicated and have a track record of completing projects on time. Give examples of your proven work ethic, flexibility, and teamwork. State clearly why you are interested in this particular job.

“You won’t stay long.”

- Answer honestly. It would help if you could honestly say you would like to work five to seven years or longer.

“This job is a step down for you.”

- This is possibly the hardest issue to confront. Be upbeat and confident in explaining why you want the job. For example, “At this point in my career, I want to apply my skills to a new field.” Or, “I want to achieve more flexibility and work-life balance.”

“Your experience is not current.”

- Recast your past as an asset to your future at the company. Name specific benefits and skills sets you can bring to the target employer.

At the end of the interview, if you feel you are still labeled “overqualified,” be assertive. Ask the interviewer an open-ended question, such as: “Is there anything else on your mind about my candidacy?” Just make sure you are prepared to answer any questions in a forthright manner. Always end the interview by reaffirming your interest in the job.

Your Attitude

If you don’t think you can do the job, why should the interviewer? Show confidence. Stress your enthusiasm for the job and the reasons why you are uniquely qualified.

- Demonstrate that you’re attuned to the workforce that you want to enter. Do the research so your knowledge is up to date on the latest developments in the field.
- Appearance bolsters a positive impression. Get a new interview outfit and look your best.
- Don’t talk at length about your vast experience. Yes, interviewers want to learn about you. Even more, they want to know what you can do for them if you’re hired.

Apply Only for Jobs You Want

If you get the “overqualified” response often, perhaps you’re applying for a job at the wrong level. How you are choosing which positions to apply for?

Even if you’re applying for stop-gap jobs in order to bring in some income, you’ll need a targeted approach—something more than “I need a job, any job.” Choose the industries, employers, and positions that make sense for you. Otherwise you may end up in the disheartening position of not getting a job you didn’t want in the first place.

