



Age concerns in applying for work

INTRODUCTION:

- They'll think I'm too old
- I haven't done anything *relevant*
- It's been years since I applied for a job
- There's no point – they'll only want youngsters
- I'm no 'spring chicken' any more

Are any of these thoughts on your mind? Are you worried about being discriminated against on the grounds of your age? Are you seeking help with presenting yourself in the best possible light in job applications? If so, then this information could be for **you**.

It may sound trite but it's true – age is a state of mind. Chances are we know people who are 'old in their twenties' or 'young for their sixties'. This state of mind is a crucial thing to consider when you're choosing a career and applying for jobs – as we'll see later. Age, experience, wisdom and maturity can mean that the older job entrant can offer the employer an immediate return on their investment.

BACKGROUND:

New Zealand has legislation in place that protects against age discrimination for those aged sixteen and over – with some exceptions. For more information on this protection, and on the exceptions, see:

- [Getting a job – An 'A' to 'Z' for employers and employees](#) from the Human Right Commission. This can be accessed and downloaded by selecting the 'Publications tab, then 'Equal Employment Opportunity' at: <http://www.hrc.co.nz>
- [National Equal Opportunities Network – http://www.neon.org.nz](http://www.neon.org.nz)

In part, this legislation has been developed because the labour market is changing. People are living longer; fewer children are being born; a smaller proportion of young people are entering the workforce; workers are staying longer in employment and employers are increasingly recognising the 'business case' for greater diversity in the workplace – including for an age-diverse staff complement.

Although this legislation has been in place for some time, change in employers' attitude and culture is by no means uniform – as yet. That being said many employers – particularly larger organisations and those in the public sector – have embedded fair and equal opportunities for all ages.

Where you feel that age could be an issue in your job search, you may want to 'target' roles, sectors and organisations where ageism may be less of an issue. There are both formal and informal ways of doing so. For example, you may choose to explore the [Equal Employment Opportunities \(EEO\) Trust](#) EEO Employers' Group. This group has in excess of 400 member organisations. Each member has made a public commitment to being a fair employer and to effectively managing a diverse workforce.

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Job applicants, employees, clients, the media and the public see those organisations as 'Employers of Choice' and members of the groups are more likely than other organisations to be actively involved in diversity and other EEO activities. When you see these logos in job advertisements, they indicate Employers of Choice:



At the informal level, it is often possible to identify good (and bad) age-friendly employers by 'reading between the lines' in job advertisements. Could phrases such as 'dynamic environment'; 'we are a young company' or 'energy and flexibility be code for 'we intend to hire a younger person'? Equally, could 'balanced workforce', 'maturity' and 'commitment to equality of opportunity' at least imply a positive attitude to older job applicants?

Also informal, is the concept of [networking](#). You might be surprised at the number, and range, of jobs that don't get advertised. Instead they are filled by people already known to the employer - hence the importance of developing and using a network of contacts. These contacts can also be hugely useful in identifying age-friendly roles; sectors and organisations. See the '[Get employment](#)' section of the [Massey Career and Employment Service](#) website for information on making and using contacts; networking and informational interviewing for further help with this (<http://careers.massey.ac.nz>).

It's vital that you are flexible and open-minded as you think of roles that would interest you. Also, that you build your resilience – there may be some rejections to face as you apply for jobs and as you approach people to network with them!

MARKETING YOURSELF FOR EMPLOYMENT:

Research!

It is likely that any successful job search will begin with this. As a start, take a (realistic) inventory of your skills; experience and knowledge. Then, consider the career areas that interest you – taking into account not just your skills and subject knowledge but also your personality; interests and values. Move onto identifying organisations and roles that are most likely to consider your skills, experience etc. as relevant.

Date of Birth:

There is no need to include your age or date-of-birth in your CV. Where this is asked for in an application form it should be on a separate sheet with other equal opportunity (EEO) monitoring questions – used for collecting anonymous statistical data for EEO reporting or profiling vacancy responses.



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Skills:

Potential employers are not only interested in the qualifications that you have. Additionally, they'll be keen to see the relevant skills that you have. As an older applicant you're likely to have a wealth of these but may not realise the vital importance of drawing these from all aspects of your life – i.e. paid and voluntary work that you've done; your studies; caring responsibilities; your hobbies and interests etc. Sometimes, the variety of your experience can be just as useful as a history of relevant work.

Make a list:

It may seem obvious, but compiling a list of your skills that you can 'cut and paste' from into your job applications can be an invaluable start to your job search. For each skill note at least one example of where you developed the skill – as employers will want to see evidence that you have this skill. For help with this see careers service handouts such as 'skills and strengths'; 'action words' and 'what do employers want?'

Produce or develop your CV:

You'll have to be prepared to create a different CV for each type of work for which you are applying. This should be concise (say 2 – 4 pages); should include all the facts about your tertiary education and qualifications (and other relevant qualifications) and should stress your relevant experience and skills. For more information on this see the '[Get selected](http://careers.massey.ac.nz)' section at <http://careers.massey.ac.nz>.

Blow your own trumpet:

It may not come naturally to you, but it is vital that you (subtly) blow your own trumpet in job applications and interviews. Remember that your application is a marketing tool – with you being the product that you're marketing! You must use positive language when outlining your knowledge; experience; skills and goals.

Crucially, avoid saying:

- "It was only..."
- "I don't have the experience you're seeking..."
- "I've just been at home bringing up my family..."
- "It was only a voluntary/short-term/part-time job..."

In short, don't apologise for your age! Confidence projects a positive self-image and will be aided if you describe things that you've done in terms of what you contributed to, and gained from, these. As an older applicant any ageism that the employer might have can be effectively countered if you can show passion; enthusiasm; interest and motivation.

As you gain interviews, remember that the careers service can offer a wealth of information; advice and resources on these – including typical questions to expect.



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COUNTERING TYPICAL DOUBTS/ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT OLDER JOB APPLICANTS:

- Every potential employer will have his or her own views on the merits – or otherwise – of hiring ‘older’ staff. However, typical concerns (and how to address these) might include:
- How you will work with younger colleagues and/or a younger manager – and vice-versa. Stress any experience that you have of this and examples of having younger people around you in your life in general. For example, have you worked with younger tutors and fellow-students?
- You’ll expect a higher salary. Here it is vital that you show that you expect only ‘the going rate for the job’. It may be possible to negotiate your salary – to some extent – on the basis of your relevant skills; qualifications and experience but not (solely) on your age. Be prepared by researching typical salaries for the role. However, be realistic too. Getting a ‘foot in the door’ could mean accepting a lower salary than you’d like – however, a higher salary might well come once you are re-established in a career.
- You’ll be ‘set in your ways’. Potential employers are likely to be keenest on recruits who know how – and when – to ask questions and who can learn from the answers! Emphasise that your studies show that you are no stranger to change and stress your flexibility and adaptability traits.
- You won’t be IT – literate. If that were true, you’d be unlikely to have coped well with tertiary study. Stress the IT skills that you have; your willingness to learn and that you are ‘quick on the uptake’.
- You won’t offer the same loyalty as a younger recruit. All the evidence points to the contrary! You’ve made a big commitment by taking on your studies, and are keen to use and apply them in the workplace. Given that it can be more difficult for an older person to find work you’re more likely to stay with a job.
- You lack work experience – or relevant experience. It is highly likely that you’ll have developed relevant skills through many aspects of your life. The key is to show what those are and where you developed them from. Potential employers will expect you to have researched the role and to be able to offer evidence that you have relevant skills.
- You’ll be ‘out of date’. Networks can be superb sources of advice on trends in the workplace and on the skills; knowledge and experience that particular roles require. In some instances, you may have to consider re-training; additional qualifications and/or periods of short term (even voluntary) work to update your skills and knowledge base. How realistic is this option for you? If it isn’t, will this mean a reappraisal of the jobs that you may apply for?
- Continuing education and professional development is crucial – particularly when it comes to IT skills. It’s vital that you highlight in your CV the programs and software packages you’ve used. The key is to ensure that you are as employable as possible.



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LOOK AT THE POSITIVES – AND HIGHLIGHT THEM:

What are some of the possible advantages of your age?

- Greater awareness of business; work environments and workplace dynamics
- More experience of handling difficult situations, and of work generally
- Commitment – as outlined above – and self-motivation
- Ability to think laterally – based on past experiences and life skills
- Maturity
- Organisational and interpersonal skills
- Ability to prioritise
- Positivity – think about how you can help the organisation achieve its objectives
- Conscientiousness and loyalty – with a willingness to take on tasks that you might not have considered or that you haven't done for a while.
- Calmness
- Easy to manage (?)

Needless to say, if you claim to have any – or all – of the above be prepared to offer evidence – i.e. examples of where you have demonstrated these skills and traits.

Finally...

Remember that Massey's Career and Employment Service can help with information and advice on any of the above.