

# 6 Tips for Acing a Job Interview After Age 50

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Competition for new jobs is brutal, even among experienced candidates. Landing a new job after age 50 can be especially difficult. The typical duration of unemployment for people older than 55 can be more than 33 weeks, far longer than the 26 weeks it takes younger workers to find a new position. *U.S. News* asked hiring managers of companies on AARP's list of the best employers for workers over age 50 to explain what impresses them in interviews. Here is some advice these managers have for older workers.

**Emphasize innovation.** Older workers often face stereotypes that they are resistant to change or unable to use technology. Tell the prospective employer about any creative ideas that improved your previous employer's bottom line or made the company more efficient. "Give an example of a project where you handled it in a different way that may not have been the standard process for handling it, but it was more effective," says Lynette Chappell-Williams of Cornell University. It also doesn't hurt to talk about the computer class you are taking while job hunting or other ways you have kept your skills up to date throughout your career.

**Articulate your enthusiasm.** Prepare to explain why you want to work for this organization. "I'm always intrigued to see what attracts the potential candidate to George Mason," says Rizna Ahmed, assistant director at the University. Peruse the company's website, and pepper the conversation with intelligent questions about the position and observations about the firm. "People will often share with us how the National Institutes of Health has helped their family or someone that they knew, and this really motivates them to work for NIH," says Sharon Ballard, director of workforce support for the NIH. "It's kind of a vocation or a calling as opposed to a job."

**Demonstrate communication skills.** Your ability to communicate is on display during a job interview. "One of the things that is important to us is someone who has an ability to work well with other people," says Chappell-Williams. She often asks job candidates: "If you are working on a particular project with three or four people, how do you delegate the responsibility that needs to be completed?" While emphasizing your interpersonal skills, make sure to share credit with coworkers, clients, and customers.

**Provide examples.** Don't just say you have good problem-solving skills. Describe a scenario when you successfully resolved an issue. "I always like to discuss with the candidate issues that they have faced in the past and how they have responded and what the end result was," says Dale Sweere, the human resources manager for Stanley Consultants. About 40 percent of the people hired by the company in the past 12 months are above age 50. "We are seeking examples of problems or projects that they were faced with and how they went about addressing client needs and client concerns." The scenarios don't necessarily have to come from a paid position. Ballard says that showcasing your volunteer work or religious activities can also help demonstrate your skills. One of her favorite questions: "Give an example of when you have dealt with a workplace conflict when you have disagreed with a superior and explain how you handled that."

**Be a role model.** Many employers hope that experienced workers will share their knowledge with their younger counterparts. "I don't think we can afford for brain drain to occur in our organizations. We want older workers to transfer some of their knowledge and expertise to the younger workers," says Alma Carmicle, human resources director for the city of Glendale, Ariz. "They have some of the best work habits in terms of their commitment, loyalty, attendance and dress." Make sure you emphasize willingness to be a mentor during your interview.

**Don't talk too much.** Baby boomers and seniors have decades' worth of experience to convey in the interview. But try not to spend the entire interview talking in an effort to impress. "I have my agenda of things that I want to discover about the person, and if they spend 15 minutes responding to one question, that just annoys me," says Paul Hvidding, vice president of human resources for National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Pick out a few experiences that you want to highlight during the interview, and practice describing them in a concise way. Says Hvidding: "Give nice crisp responses, and be aware of the needs of the interviewer to gather the information that they need."