

Ask Sabina: How can I combat age discrimination in my job search?

Dear Sabina, I'm 55 and am currently looking for a new job. I have years of relevant industry experience but I feel that I'm instantly being dismissed because I'm over 50. How can I get an employer to look past my age? From, Lindy

Dear Lindy,

There's no doubt ageism is a very real form of discrimination that exists in the employment industry. And it's incredibly frustrating to face being overlooked for a role simply because of the year on your birth certificate. Adhering to stereotypes of any kind has cost many businesses valuable employees. These biases shouldn't exist, but they do. So, the best thing you can do in the search for your next role is to focus on the things you can control—your own beliefs and skills, and how you sell them.

To start with, it can help to look at your own perspective on what a mature worker can bring to the table. If you've experienced a sense of rejection based on age it can be easy to buy into negative thoughts, even subconsciously, like "Maybe I am too old for this," or "Perhaps younger workers do have the edge on me". It's important to challenge these thoughts, and committing to ongoing personal and professional growth can help. Update your skills and keep on top of current trends and technology in your industry to minimise these as possible roadblocks to career development and success.

Next, reaffirm to yourself what you've got to offer. There are so many skills and traits that come with years of experience—perspective, flexibility, fewer dependents, and the ability to mentor others—and you need to recognise yours. Think about the wide range of people you've worked with, industry changes you've experienced, and the knowledge and skills you've collected and then look at how you can highlight the value in these to a potential employer. Once you're clear in your own mind that age really is an asset, you'll be better equipped to sell yourself rather than feel you have to defend yourself in comparison to younger workers.

On a practical note, if you feel your age is preventing your resume from getting into the right hands, leave it off! There's no legal requirement to list your date of birth. You want your skills and experience to be the focus—don't lose sight of the fact your resume is just like a book cover that needs to grab the attention of an employer, manager, HR exec or recruiter, and leave them wanting to know more.

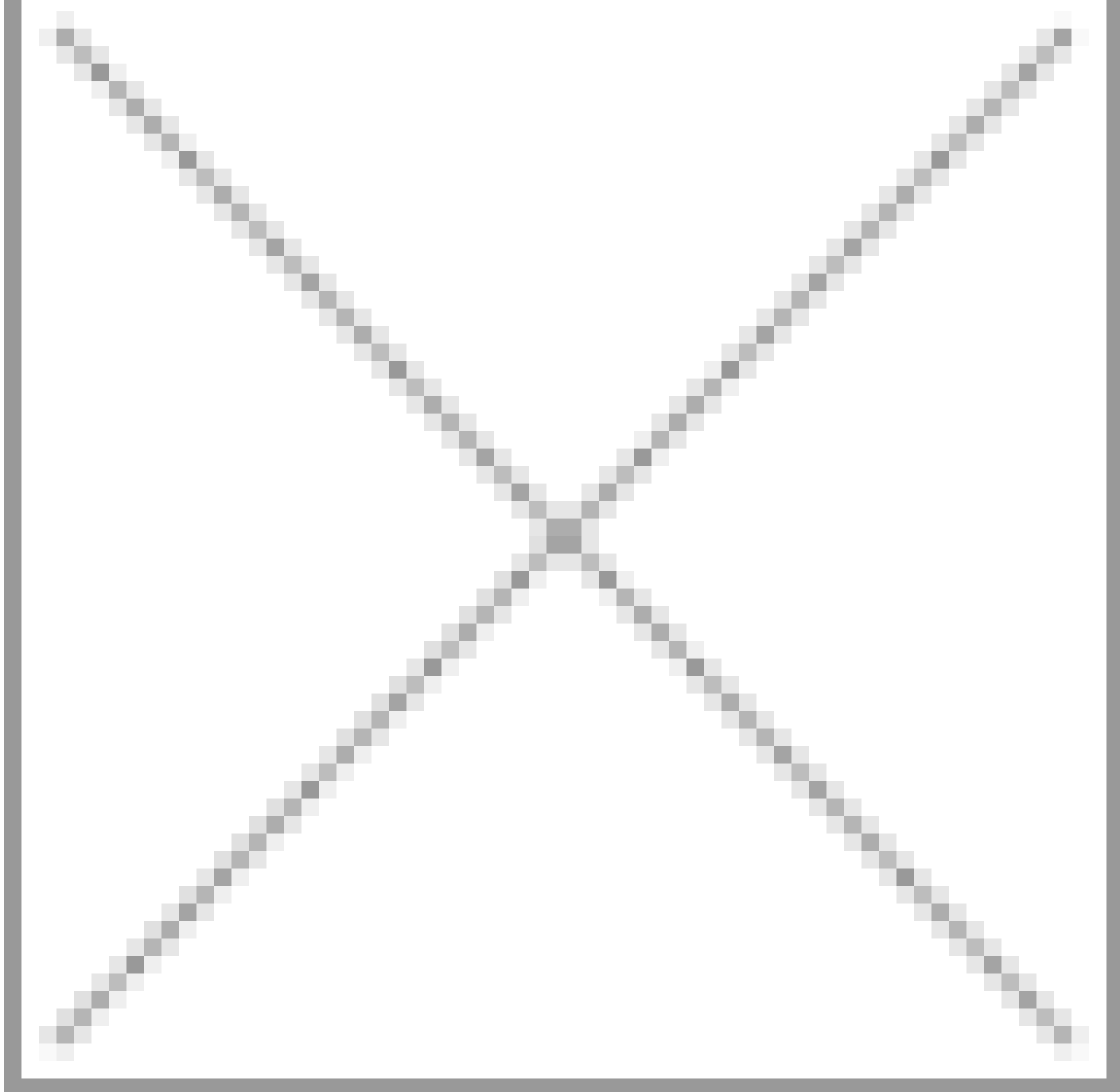
To reduce the emphasis on age, avoid listing the part-time job you had at university or the junior roles you undertook decades ago. Stick to the more recent roles that showcase your well-honed strengths, experience and skills in relation to the new roles you're seeking.

Finally, you'll need to go beyond words on paper and be ready to discuss your skills and assets in person. Reframe the interview experience with a prospective employer as an opportunity to sell your talents, personality, passion and expertise with more detail and context.

By taking these steps to understand and strengthen the skills and traits you've gained through your working life, you'll be able to turn the focus toward the value you can bring to prospective employers because of your years of experience.

Good luck with your job search journey, Lindy.

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