

Briefing

Looking for Work: Hints for Older Jobseekers

Preparing

Sell yourself

Be clear that you are in a labour market, that employers probably have plenty of choice and want the best person for the job. You have to sell yourself. Knowing your own strengths and weaknesses, your unique selling points and flexibility are all important. You should think about all this and talk it through with someone you can trust. Perhaps get someone who has worked with you to say what they think your strong points are and go from there.

Have confidence, energy and professionalism

Confidence, energy and professionalism are important. Be confident in what you have to offer and about yourself. Be energetic but also strategic in the way you embark on a job search.

Know what you are in for and give yourself a trial run

Try to familiarise yourself with current interview or selection techniques that may be used. If you have never attended a selection centre interview which might include role playing and various assignments, try to find out more about them. See if there is someone you know who can run through the kind of thing you might face.

Look and think outside your career box

Think laterally about what you are looking for and what you are willing to do. If you have spent years in one job or profession, you may find it hard to get back into the same sort of work, but be willing to use your other skills and knowledge, perhaps gained in hobbies, voluntary work or otherwise in your private life. You may surprise yourself by hitting on a role that is completely different from anything you have done before but somehow you have all the skills needed to do it. Use the TAEN/Fairplay skills assessment toolkit on the TAEN website: www.taen.org.uk/resources

Be proactive

Think about the kinds of organisations you would like to work for and for which you think you may have something to offer. Find the name of someone who is the right person to contact and write or email them a brief expression of interest with a short and well worded CV, emphasising your flexibility and availability. Say that it is a speculative enquiry but that you would be happy to meet informally.

Applying

Work hard at it but be strategic

Looking for a job is a job in itself and you have to set about it the right way. Don't simply send off as many applications as you can find time to do. Do look for the jobs with person requirements that you can genuinely offer. Don't be discouraged by refusals – it is a difficult time out there. Keep going

Learn to love your computer: tailor your applications and CVs

Learn how to use your computer cleverly in your job searches. Have a core CV that you can draw from and customise a CV for every application. Don't create a bad impression by having a silly email address like *wizenedgrandad@hotmail.com*. If you are applying online, be ready to be ignored. You may not get acknowledgements.

Make it easy for the recruiter to see what you offer

Be quite sure that your application shows that you meet all the "essential requirements" in the job specification. If it doesn't, don't bother to apply as the computer vetting process will probably discard you at the first sift. Go for a CV style that takes dates out as far as possible but don't be defensive about them. Try to give good and relevant examples from your own experience that match the job and the work.

Be pragmatic and flexible

Companies can easily refuse to interview you and you will not have much come back, so do your homework on the company. Be flexible both in what you are willing to do and the hours and conditions you are willing to work. You have to be willing to compromise on pay and status level. (If you have spent years climbing a career ladder, you are unlikely to be welcomed back into the fold at the same level - though see the point on interim management and consultancy). If you are willing to work as an unpaid intern for a month or so in order to gain experience and give the employer a chance to see what you can do, say so.

Interviews**Look smart and be bright and keen**

Employers are looking for the best, the brightest, the most skilled. Older workers are well placed to score here, but employers are also influenced by things like appearance, dress and the way you speak. Make sure you look as smart as possible. It may seem cruel but you have to face the fact that appearances may matter.

Don't mention your age – but don't be defensive either

Don't describe yourself as "retired" and don't raise the subject of your age, but don't be defensive about it. Don't make jokes yourself about your age but if anything is said, smile and ignore it. In your demeanour, act enthusiastically and positively. If you would love the chance to come and work for the organisation, say so.

Show what you have but don't be boring, patronising or overpowering

Take every chance to parade your attributes but don't come over as pushy. Don't under any circumstances patronise your interviewer, even if he or she is 30 years younger than you are. Be polite, smile, use eye contact.

Other options**Be creative and use your social contacts**

Use your personal contacts and network; lots of people get jobs that way. You may find a job filling in for a few months or a maternity leave replacement. Take it. You will be in a better position once you are in a job to apply for another.

Consider interim employment or self employment

You can move in and out of self employment if you wish but a spell working on your own running your own business will not do you any harm. Or you might consider a portfolio career where you are in fact doing two or three part time jobs or combining employment with self employment. If you need advice on setting up a small business, contact Business Link or Prime (www.primeinitiative.org.uk).

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TAEN's aim is to help create an effective labour market which works for people in mid and later life, for employers and for the economy.

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