

Making a Career Move After 50

Q. I am in my early fifties and contemplating a career move. Should I avoid using dates in my resume so I don't give away my age? Will my age put me at a disadvantage?

A. Not unless you let it! In the right position, your life and work experience can give you the edge over other candidates.

If you have been looking through the job classifieds, you have undoubtedly noticed that most employers are looking to hire individuals with three to seven years of relevant experience. Rarely do employers run ads seeking individuals with twenty-plus years experience. That doesn't mean there aren't excellent opportunities out there for mature attorneys. For those of us who have been out of law school more than ten years, the best opportunities will probably be found through our personal contacts, not through the classifieds.

You may be tempted to answer an ad for an interesting opportunity seeking an attorney with far less experience than you. It may not hurt to answer such an ad, but it is probably unlikely you will receive serious consideration.

Why not? The company or firm has assessed its needs and has probably determined that they need someone to assist a more experienced attorney. Would you be willing to take directions from someone who may be considerably younger than you? Would you be willing to accept a salary that is appropriate for a junior attorney? Probably not. A better approach, is to learn more about companies and firms by reading and talking to trusted colleagues and friends. Through your networking find out if there is a need for a more senior attorney with your expertise. If it appears from your research that someone may have a need, ask a colleague to make an introduction for you. Yes, this takes considerably more effort than simply answering an ad, but it is also more likely to be successful.

About your resume -- There are career guides that recommend omitting graduation dates and even employment dates if you are over forty-five. Talking to local recruiters and other career professionals, the general consensus is: "Don't omit these dates." Instead, you may want to emphasize your youthfulness by including athletic interests under "Activities." If your computer skills are good, list them as well. An employer will be less concerned with your age, if you are healthy and up-to-date with technology.

At any age it is important to assess carefully your values, talents and skills before attempting a career move. This is particularly true if you have significant work experience. There are fewer

positions at the higher levels and higher salaries. Only an attorney who is able to articulate why she is the best qualified candidate is likely to land one of these positions.

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