

WHY CAN'T OLDER EMPLOYEES FIND JOBS?



When do you think companies will once again respect/retain/hire those of us age 35-55, with excellent experience in many areas, rather than throwing us out or rejecting us? It was embarrassing for my husband to look for a job for three years and have young recruiters look at him with disdain and with the attitude, "you are too old to be working with computers," or "you're overqualified; go away." He looks about early 40's – full head of hair, youthful appearance, etc. My company has hired so many of these young, clueless, and restless kids that nothing gets done anymore. I would think that over the next few years these companies will learn that they need some experienced employees to guide these young things.

Thanks for your input.

Mary

Dear Mary,

Whoa! While it's true that there are lots of "young things" out there with little experience, there are also plenty of "old timers" who hope to get hired but don't take the necessary steps to be marketable candidates. Sometimes both parties need to take steps to improve on this problem.

The job market, in theory, is ripe for candidates of all ages. Statistically speaking, there will be 25 percent more jobs than eligible candidates in the next ten years. This imbalance means that candidates will have more choices and companies will have to expand their criteria if they hope to fill their openings. The population is getting older and people aged 35-65 will soon form a larger percentage of the population than ever before.

How do people in this age group make sure they aren't being passed over for jobs? One key to marketability is making sure they have the necessary skill sets. Your husband is in a particularly fast-paced and rapidly changing field. Has he kept up to date with the latest skills, programs, and languages that he needs to survive in the tech world? Does he keep abreast of industry trends? Is he familiar with the direction of the companies to which he applies? All of these traits are crucial to finding a job in any industry, at any age.

If your husband is consistently told he is overqualified or "too old," but he has the necessary experience and qualifications, the real problem may be his interviewing skills. Companies often use the "overqualified" excuse as a way of skirting the fact that the candidate didn't interview well. Unfortunately, as we get older, we tend to think we "know it all" and young people may be frustrated or annoyed by that attitude. Be sure not to come across as condescending to your interviewer, regardless of his or her age, or else you can kiss that job goodbye. A much smarter approach is to try and communicate how your employment with the company can result in a constructive and mutually beneficial partnership.

Now, don't get me wrong, Mary. There are certainly cases in which a qualified, older candidate is treated disdainfully by younger interviewers or recruiters, through no fault of the candidate. In these cases, the companies who retain these recruiters do themselves damage. If your husband is a victim of cut and dried age discrimination, he can take the company to court. But if the case is not clearly discrimination, or if he doesn't have time (or money) for legal wrangling, it is best to cut his losses and find different recruiters with whom to work.

There are many recruiters, both internal and external, that are eager to work with experienced candidates such as your husband. It shouldn't matter whether his appearance is youthful or not; if he's got the necessary skills and the determination to succeed, he should be able to find a company who wants him. Those companies that continue to hire only young candidates will soon have to change their practices or they will fall behind their competitors and may eventually fail.