

## JOB SEARCH

## Is it My Age or My Salary?

Whether it's the gray in your hair or the green in your paycheck, here's how to overcome the seniority sticking point.

By **Kevin Fogarty**  
December 1, 2008

**A**GE DISCRIMINATION IS NEITHER LEGAL NOR fair. Nevertheless, it is prevalent in a variety of forms, job seekers, career coaches and recruiters agree.

Most often the discrimination isn't overt; it's more a function of who does the initial filtering of resumes and job candidates and the likelihood that those relatively junior staffers don't understand the real requirements of the job they're filling or what an experienced executive would bring to it.

"I've found age discrimination pretty prevalent," said John, an OpsLadder member who is an expert in sourcing and supply-chain management. Working through TheLadders, John was recently hired by a leading medical equipment company, six months after he was laid off as director of materials management, supply chain, purchasing and



inventory at telecommunications equipment maker JDS Uniface. (See story, Page 3.)

"It's not overwhelming, but it is disheartening. You talk to a lot of recruiters who weed you out before you get to the manager to explain the value you can bring," said John, who is 59. "And there are two parts to it: age, certainly in my case, but with 28 years of experience, your comp package is pretty high."

It's almost impossible for job candidates to tell whether they're being judged or passed over based on their age or their salary, according to Diane Grimard Wilson, a career coach who is president of Grimard Wilson Consulting Inc. and author of *Back in Control: How to Stay Sane, Productive, and Inspired in Your Career Transition*.

The sticking point could be just that the interviewer is surprised to see gray hair on a candidate he or she assumed was younger.

"If you're an executive in your mid-50s who made it through the first screenings because you didn't put your first couple of jobs on your resume or excluded the year you graduated, you could walk into that interview and be talking to an HR person who's the age of your child," said Sally Haver, senior vice president of business development at The Ayers Group/Career Partners International, a recruiting company that specializes in career transitions and outplacement.

Those relatively inexperienced screeners have usually been told that their responsibility is to say 'no' as often and quickly as possible to candidates who don't fit the pattern,

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according to Jim Villwock, president of expense-management service IEM Group Inc. and author of the forthcoming *Whacked Again! Secrets to Getting Back on the Executive Saddle*.

“You’re at the mercy of low-level people with a slate of profiles to match,” he said. “You can address that by talking about the value you bring, but you have to be at the top of your game to do it. The subject matter you’re presenting is difficult for people at that level.”

The goal, Haver said, is to satisfy the interviewer that your qualifications fit the profile and that there are no other issues – such as age, health problems or unusually high salary requirements – that would disqualify you.

“You want to convince them you’re pass-on-able. If you are in this screening interview with HR, you want it to be as transparent as possible,” she said.

### Prepare to Overcome Objections

The key to being successful isn’t hiding your age or salary but being prepared with explanations or propositions designed to overcome the objections screeners of different types will bring up, according to Cheryl Palmer, a certified career coach and president of CallToCareer.com.

“Think like a salesperson, even if you’re not,” Palmer said. “A salesperson practices to deal with any objections you might bring up because they know what the potential objections will be.”

For a screener it might be enough to demonstrate that you’re still energetic, focused and vital despite a few gray hairs.

“You can get a lot of questions settled before they’re even

asked,” Palmer said. “Usually the first few minutes of the interview are, ‘Did you have trouble finding the place’ or, ‘How was your weekend?’ Instead of the usual, you can go out of your way to say, ‘I went hiking with some buddies of mine over the weekend, and I feel great!’ Right at the outset you paint this picture of someone who’s energetic and raring to go. You’ve painted over those misgivings without even knowing if age would be an issue.”

Questions about compensation and authority are stickier but can be dealt with a lot more directly with the hiring manager than issues as potentially liable as age, Haver said.

“If you’re talking to the hiring manager, you can cut to the chase and say, ‘I can do everything you need done and more, and you’re going to be thrilled,’” Haver said. ““You will not find anybody who can do this job better than I can do it, so let’s talk about how you can bring me on board in a way that’s comfortable for you.””

If compensation is the sticking point, you can suggest that the hiring manager bring you in near the top of the scale

that would have been appropriate for the more-junior person that was originally expected in the role, with the understanding that your compensation will be reviewed in six months based on the amount of value you bring to the job.

“You can start on a consulting basis to get your foot in the door and say you’re comfortable with that arrangement because you know the kind of value you can bring to the organization,” Haver said. “Make the entry point as comfortable as possible for them.”

According to Villwock, the key to making the compensation

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–Sally Haver  
The Ayers Group/Career Partners International

## Older Candidates: Don’t Take a Back Seat in the Hiring Process

By Joe Turner

**Don’t let worries about your age block your path. Use these five tips to take control of your job search.**

**D**OES AGE BIAS EXIST in the hiring process today? That’s a tricky question, as it’s often hard to prove. Yet many mature workers seem to

face an uphill battle when competing against Gen-Xers and Yers today.

Here are five pointers for candidates who may have a few years under their belts.

### 1. Change Your Mindset

Remind yourself that you’re *experienced*, not old. You’re seasoned, not

over-the-hill. You’re here-and-now, not history. It’s all about spin and reframing.

The latest financial- and credit-market collapse has created a lot of employment casualties and anxiety. But there’s hope. Just because you’re an older worker doesn’t mean you’re permanently sidelined. We can all agree that today’s job market is tough,

talk work is demonstrating not that you can do elegantly the kinds of things a less experienced person might not know to do at all but to show that your experience makes you uniquely valuable compared to other candidates for the job.

“Most executives I talk to are strictly a commodity,” Villwock said. “They say they have 20 years experience, but it’s one year of experience 20 times.

“If you do your research – and I’m talking about doing as much as 40 hours of research including talking to people

inside and outside the company before a final slate of interviews – you can show that you know the company, know what problems it’s really facing, and can offer ways to address those problems.

“If I’m the CEO or CFO or COO, I care about return on investment, cost savings, how you’re going to help me increase revenue, not how you’re going to train people in your department,” Villwock said. “That says to me you’re not a commodity and, to me as the CEO, that you can do things to solve the problems I’m worried about.”

**HIRE!**

## ‘Don’t Settle’ Works for Manufacturing VP

A 59-year-old member of TheLadders found success in his search without ceding ground on title or compensation.

By Kevin Fogarty

**I**N WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE A 12-MONTH SEARCH for a new job, an OpsLadder member named John did a lot to make things more difficult for himself.

He didn’t lower his sights from the vice-president level he lost and wanted to regain; he didn’t go along with the advice of friends and recruiters that he lower his expectations and salary requirements; and he didn’t cut anyone any slack when it became apparent his age could be an issue, even for jobs that typically require decades of experience to qualify.

“I was averaging at least two telecom interviews a week,

and maybe a face-to-face interview every three weeks,” he said. “In phone interviews, people are certainly trying to judge your personality by listening to your voice, but they ask you key questions and try to disqualify you that way. Like, ‘So ... tell me, what year did you get your MBA?’ My question was, ‘What’s the relevance?’”

Graduation year could be relevant for a school that was going through a particular management philosophy at the time, acknowledges John, 59, who got his at the beginning of the ‘80s. Newer MBAs have more training in Six Sigma and other operational-discipline approaches.

“But were they trying to establish where my school was in that era? Or that I’m an old-timer?” he asked.

“There were times when people would tell me I didn’t put down a year on my form, and they wanted me to do that before they’d talk to me, and I said we should talk first. You have to be nice to all of them, but there’s a point where I get into an honesty thing. What do they want that I don’t have, and what do I have that they don’t value?” he said. “I did talk to some recruiters and said, ‘The hiring company is going to

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challenging and competitive. You can win in any job market with a can-do attitude and by powering up the tools you use to find a good job.

### 2. Go on the Offensive

You may be an older worker, but you’re not stupid, and you’re not dead. Use your savvy to sell your experience against youth. There are benefits to being older, like having wisdom and common sense, and a long work record of accomplishments. Sell your track record. During the interview, take ad-

vantage of your lengthy work history. Remember when you were fresh out of school and had no experience? It’s hard breaking into a career or getting a job without experience. Aren’t you glad you’re not in that position anymore? Appreciate being on the other end of the spectrum now, and turn your age into an advantage. Start by seeing your age as a strength and an asset.

### 3. Wear Just One Hat

Focus only on the job title for which

you’re applying. Tell them what they want to know and nothing more. Most likely you’ve worn many different hats during your career. If your duties and experiences from some of your previous positions don’t address the job title’s requirements, don’t emphasize them. In fact, get them off your resume entirely if you can. Don’t give employers another reason to screen you out. This is your story. Tell it your way. Magnify only the aspects of your background that are relevant to your target objective. You want to focus

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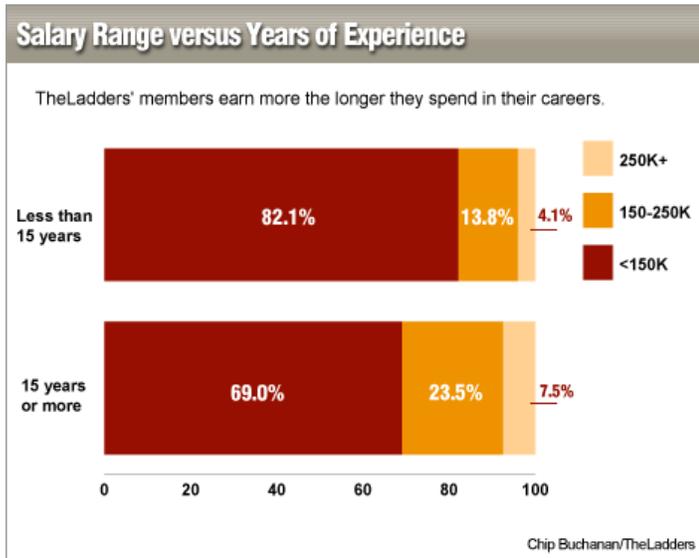
## Behind the Numbers: How Salary, Years Affect Your Search

How does length of career and size of compensation affect the length of the hunt for TheLadders' customers?

By Ryan Peterson, TheLadders Business Intelligence

HOW DOES TIME IN THE WORK FORCE affect compensation for members of TheLadders? And how much do years and salary prolong their job searches?

According to TheLadders' data, members at the high end of the experience range – 15 years or more – earn significantly more than their less-experienced peers. Ultimately, however, it is higher salary expectations that extend the job search rather than long work histories.



## Around the Web: If Age Is a Barrier

Surveys say age discrimination rises when times are tight. Here are some online resources to bridge the gap.

By Jordan Breindel

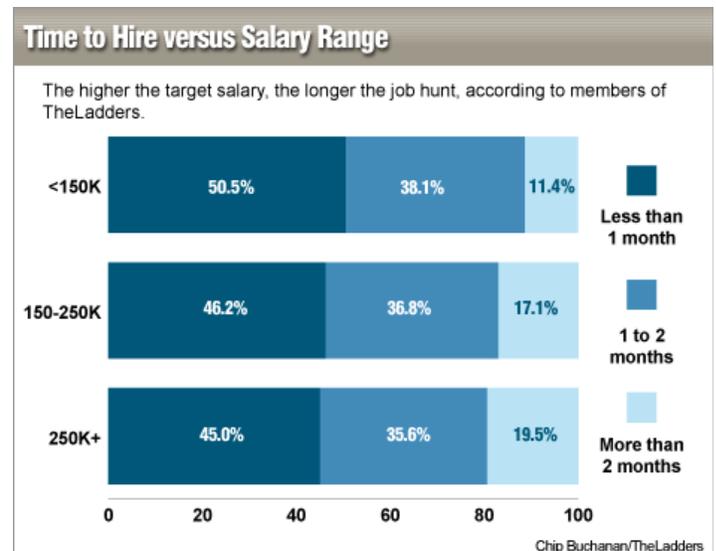
OF THE THOUSANDS OF AGE-DISCRIMINATION claims filed each year, about 10 percent are related to hiring. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Age discrimination definitely increases during tough economic times." The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 offers a protection against this, but as with every law, there are processes that need to be followed and certain conditions that need to be met. Below you'll find a variety of resources for helping you determine whether or not to file a claim and how to do so.

- If you feel you've been discriminated against in any way throughout the hiring process, you can file a claim with the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**. The EEOC has **specific instructions** on how to file.

Working Fairness has an **extensive rundown** of what acts legally constitute age discrimination and who is covered under the ADEA (Age Discrimination Employment Act), as well as tips on how to prevent and deal with age discrimination in the workforce.

- The AARP **offers information** on how to file a claim and what to expect after your claim has been filed.

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your resume to reflect yourself in the most positive, powerful ways possible.

### 4. Modify Your Resume

Take another look at your resume. Ask, “Would I hire myself for this position?” You can’t do anything about your age, and you can’t change the cultural and employment biases that exist today against older workers. But you can stack the job-hunting deck in your favor by reworking your resume to emphasize your strengths. Spin your story in your favor. Make sure everything relates in some way to your desired job objective. Drop old work history from your resume. You generally shouldn’t need to show more than 10 years’ work history. Any prior work is most likely irrelevant now, bores the reader and emphasizes your age. Remove obvious road markers such as dates. Remove college degree dates and older professional-training dates that go back more than a few years. Of course you’ve been around a while, but you don’t have to shine a flashing light on the fact.

### 5. Sell Results

Here’s the most important tip of all: Hiring managers today are looking for results, not years. Talk the language that an employer understands and appreciates, which is return on investment. Instead of citing 20 years of experience, identify your benefits to the employer and put them into monetary terms. Back up your accomplishments with facts that are benefit-based. Sell them from the perspective of the end result of your work and how it served your present and previous employers.

Money talks and it talks rather loudly. Here’s some good news: Money can trump age. As an employee, you either make money or save money for your employer. If the hiring manager doesn’t see your value in one of these two categories, then you don’t want to work for this company. In this recession, if the company isn’t concerned about its bottom line, then it may not be around for long and isn’t a viable option for you anyway. Get as close to money as you possibly can in the language of your accomplishments, and list them on your resume.

### Summary

If you’re an older, experienced worker, you don’t have to take a back seat in the hiring process. While there will be

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put an investigator out to check my background, and I’m fine with that. Why not wait until then for that particular answer?” The recruiters worked very well that way, but not so much the internal HR managers.”

John spent more than 28 years in operations. He specialized in supply-chain management; purchasing of raw materials and supplies; and managing vendors, shippers and inventory. John made sure the manufacturers he worked for had the parts they needed when they needed them, didn’t pay too much for them, and didn’t overpay for having too many on hand at any one time.

His new job, which he located through TheLadders, is as a vice president, overseeing supply-chain and materials management for a medical equipment manufacturer he prefers not to name.

His last job – a vice president-level job as director of material management, supply chain, purchasing, inventory control and receiving for telecommunications equipment manufacturer JDS Uniface – effectively ended six months before he was actually laid off.

The CEO, looking for fresh blood in top management, laid off seven senior vice presidents in the space of a few weeks, including John’s boss. For six weeks John theoretically reported to the CEO, but he was actually redundant – working for a central corporate group after the rest of the company split into business divisions.

“I could have taken a smaller job working in one of the divisions, but the reality was the people running those divisions wanted to pick their own people,” he said.

He started his job search six months before he actually got his pink slip.

The most amazing thing, aside from the unexpectedly negative reaction to his age, was the assumption on the part of friends, colleagues and recruiters that he would and should take a more junior position than the one he’d been doing.

“I looked at a lot of those jobs, manager and director level rather than vice-president level, and it was stuff I was doing 10 years ago,” he says. “I didn’t want to do that. I’m in it for a career, not just to put in my 40 hours and go home. If a guy came to me at age 59 and said he’d be willing to take a job one or two levels below where he was, I’d think he was just trying to ride out his time until retirement. I wouldn’t be interested in hiring him, and I didn’t want to be that guy.”

He stuck to his guns, refusing one job that offered a vice-president VP title but \$30,000 less per year than he’d been led to expect. He also watched a number of opportunities either

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evaporate; go to younger, less qualified executives; or devolve into something too junior for him to want.

The job he eventually got – the original contact for which he made after responding to an ad on TheLadders.com – took six months from first contact until the actual offer was made. After responding to the ad, he spoke to recruiters and hiring managers, who would then disappear for weeks before surfacing for another round of discussions with John and other final candidates.

The company made a firm offer in September that required John to move 350 miles from San Jose, Calif., to Los Angeles.

“I was willing to move, and I said that up front,” John said. “A lot of people weren’t, so that was one advantage.”

Another was the clear presentation of the value he could offer – a value he defined by showing where and how he’d been able to save money on the purchase, shipment and storage of components in his previous job.

“I’d spent a lot of time the previous four or five years developing cost-reduction roadmaps,” he said. “I listed the things I was able to impact and the cost reductions and eventually the cost of goods sold and gross margins. Bringing that to the table allowed me to talk about the things I can do based

on what I’ve done in the past. That made for a very clear picture.”

► WEB

• The AARP also has **advice and resources for employers** on avoiding age discrimination during the hiring process. For those thinking about filing a claim, it might also be interesting to look at the issue from the employer’s perspective.

• MarketWatch has put together a highly comprehensive series of articles on age discrimination. **One article** offers advice for older job seekers about the job search process and how older job seekers can proactively and preemptively deal with age bias. A **second story** provides additional information and advice on filing an age-bias claim.

• **Agging Workforce News** is a news Web site that tracks developments, tools and resources for managing older workers and boomers in the workplace. Its comprehensive **links section** features a wealth of information for older workers, including “Interview Questions for Older Workers to Anticipate,” “10 Job Ideas for Older Workers,” and “Approaches and Tactics for Older Workers Who Can’t Find a Job.”

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age discrimination with some employers, you can still stack the deck in your favor. Remember, it’s about being honest but also about emphasizing your strengths rather than magnifying your vulnerabilities. Do this, and you can find a great job regardless of the economy.

*As a recruiter, Joe Turner (the “Job Search Guy”) has spent the past 15 years finding and placing top candidates in some of the best jobs of their careers. Author of Job Search Secrets Unlocked and Paycheck 911, Joe has interviewed on radio talk shows and offers free insider job search secrets at: <http://www.jobchangesecrets.com>.*

**Career Advice from TheLadders:  
Age and Your Job Search**

- You’re Too Old for These Olympics
- Fifty and Finished, or 50 and Flourishing?
- Job-Search Strategies for Professionals over 40
- Tips for Boomer Resumes
- Avoiding the “Too Old” Stigma in Your Executive Job Search
- Should You Finally Get that Degree — at 50?