

# Fighting Ageism in a Job Interview

*A guide to understanding ageism in hiring, and how to broach the subject of age in your next interview.*

By Mac Prichard  
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list



## Ageism at Work

Some topics are very likely to come up in your next job interview: your work history, your skills, your education, and maybe even your hobbies.

One subject that probably won't be broached is your age. Why? [It is illegal for employers to ask how old you are](#) or set age limits for particular jobs. To avoid liability, most employers steer clear of any discussion of age. They won't ask how old you are and they don't want you to bring up the topic either.

The fact that age isn't openly discussed doesn't mean that it isn't a factor in the hiring process. Ageism is a major issue in hiring and professional communities in general. According to AARP, [64% of workers report](#) that they have seen or experienced age discrimination in the workplace.



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Ageism in hiring is a tricky problem: the laws that prohibit ageism in hiring are nearly impossible to enforce, since most ageist hiring managers use any excuse besides age for not hiring older workers. In fact, the legal prohibition against discussing age may make things worse.

Employers have preconceptions—some reasonable, most not—about older professionals. When concerns about age aren't addressed in the open, they become even bigger barriers to being hired.

That's why I encourage older job seekers to embrace their age, rather than run from it. Proactively broaching the topic allows you to address the employer's unspoken concerns and diffuse age as a consideration in the hiring decision.

## Ageist stereotypes in hiring

The truth is that many organizations would love to have employees with the experience and skills older candidates bring to the table. The problem is that these employers can harbor preconceived—and often unconscious—stereotypes against older workers. They're afraid you cost too much, or that you won't work well with younger managers, or that you're not up to speed with the latest technology.

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Most of the time these stereotypes are completely disconnected from you, your candidacy, or the objective reality of any other older professional.

The key is to understand the employer's unspoken worries related to your age and then preemptively address each one of these issues in the interview. If you can disprove the hiring manager's underlying stereotypes of older workers, you'll thrive no matter how old you are!

## Break free from the “older worker” stereotype

Most employers would prefer to avoid talking about age. Any explicit discussion about age, however benign, exposes them to legal risk. You can't bluntly introduce the topic and expect a good result.

Instead, you need to take a subtle, strategic approach. You can be so subtle that you never utter the words “age” or “old” at all.

Rather than directly talking about your age, you should destroy the underlying age stereotypes that manifest ageism. This can be a challenge in an interview, when you have limited time and a relatively structured discussion format. However, many interview questions leave the door open for positioning yourself outside the “older worker” stereotype. In each response you give, let the interviewer know you understand their concern and show them how you're different.



**Turn the page for a  
cheatsheet on addressing  
age in the most common  
interview questions.**

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## Tactfully address the “age issue” in every interview response...

Interview question	Unspoken Concern	Your strategy
“Tell me about your comfort level with technology.”	You’re not up to date with technology.	Stay up-to-date on <u>new technology</u> with training  Proactively bring up industry- or role-specific technology you use
“How do you function as part of a team?”	You won’t work well with younger co-workers or managers.	Discuss your experience working in diverse office environments  Address age gaps! Share an experience where you learned from a younger co-worker
“Business is always changing. How do you stay up-to-date?”	You’re stuck in your ways and won’t adapt to new management and business practices.	Discuss recent trends in your industry  Avoid being overly critical of new ways of doing business
“Where do you see yourself in 5 years?”	You’re looking for a job where you can “coast” until you retire.	Articulate your career vision and explain why you’re excited to continue working  Talk about professional goals and new challenges you want to tackle
“What are your salary requirements?”	You probably want more money than we can afford.	Be prepared to discuss salary earlier in the interview process  Say that salary is only one consideration in your job search
“What other benefits are you looking for?”	Providing you healthcare benefits will be too expensive	Casually bring up fitness-related hobbies  Don’t share health-related history

## About Mac Prichard

Mac Prichard, founder and publisher of [Mac's List](#), has been connecting people to rewarding work for decades. As a transplant to Portland, Oregon in the early 1990s, Mac learned the secrets to finding work in a competitive market. He has since become a recognized expert on job hunting and career management. Mac writes for the [Mac's List blog](#), hosts a weekly podcast, [Find Your Dream Job](#), and is the author of [Land Your Dream Job in Portland \(and Beyond\)](#) and [Land Your Dream Job Anywhere](#).

## About Mac's List

Since 2001, Mac's List has been Oregon's premier job search resource, an online community connecting thousands of passionate and talented people to meaningful work opportunities in the Pacific Northwest. A registered B Corp, Mac's List is an organization with a social mission: to give people the tools and knowledge they need to conduct effective job searches. We do this through our [job board](#), a [blog](#), a [podcast](#), and [online courses](#) all dedicated to the nuts and bolts of job hunting and career management. More than 80,000 people a month connect with Mac's List.

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