

**Eight Ways to Charm an Interviewer Half Your Age**

An interview is a complex interaction.

And it doesn’t get any easier when you are 50+.

Now you have the added dimension of interviewers being (much) younger than you. That’s a whole new dynamic.

* How do you relate?
* How can they really appreciate all that you bring?
* How do you prove you have what it takes?
* How to you deal with the elephant in the room – the possibility that they are prejudiced against ‘older workers’?

Because, maybe, in their mind, you are well past it. But they want to meet you anyway, just in case. (Of course they would never admit to that. Age discrimination is illegal, after all).

And you? You will have your own thoughts and feelings about being quizzed by someone who was still in kindergarten when you were already battling it out in the workplace, right?

You know how to position yourself and share your USP. That is a given. The real challenge is leaving your baggage at the door and focusing on how to engage with your opposite, whatever their age, and whatever their expectations.

Here are some tips to help you manage this scenario of ‘old’ versus ‘young’.

So you can charm your interviewers. Not lose them as soon as you come through the door.

1. **Clear your mind of previous disappointments**. Statistically, getting a new job aged 50+ takes longer.

[insert link: https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-02/Silver-lining-UK-economy-crucial.pdf

Chances are you have already been rejected a few times. And that hurts. No wonder you are fearful, and can’t help thinking ‘here we go again!’ and ‘please let this one work out’. Or you are putting yourself under pressure and saying to yourself ‘I’m running out of money. I just have to nail this interview, or I’m in trouble’. However, feeling fearful makes us less resourceful, less responsive and less able to access our memory for the good things that we want to share. Exactly the opposite of what you need at interview. Try to think though a new lense. This is your very first interview, with a new employer. It’s a chance for a new start.

1. **Don’t be taken by surprise.** When you have been working for 20 or 30 years, at a senior level, you expect your counterpart to be of similar age. These days, professionals in their mid to late twenties come with big responsibilities (and big job titles), especially in fast-paced industries like advertising, technology or the digital sector. It can be a shock when your interviewer is the same age as your children, nephews or nieces. And as soon as you think ‘blimey, how can this youngster really appreciate what I bring to the table’, your facial expression and body language will have given it away. It will not go unnoticed. It will not go down well. Expect to meet someone much younger than you, very different from you, who you need to relate to exceedingly well. Don’t let your own expectations get in the way.
2. **Humble does it.** Hand on heart – when you sit opposite an interviewer half your age, do you have moments when you think ’by the time I was successful in this field, you were still in your nappies?’ Or ’aren’t you just too young to remember …?’ These thoughts are bound to creep into your head. It’s only natural. It hurts when those who have so much less experience than you decide whether you get the job or not. Stop your internal monologue. Don’t let your exasperation get in the way of building rapport with the interviewer. Shift gear. Look beyond their age and comparative inexperience. Whether you like it or not, you are equals. Come across as patronising, and you spoil your chance of winning them round.
3. **Establish what you have in common**. Come to the interview well prepared. Of course you will have looked at your potential employer’s website, digital footprint and Glassdoor reviews, and your interviewer’s LinkedIn profile, Twitter feed, Google+ postings, Snapchat account or Instagram profile (or wherever they hang out online).
   1. What have you learnt about the person? Companies they worked for, places they lived in, universities they have studied at, conferences they have attended, speeches they have given, people they are connected to, things they find interesting.
   2. What do you have in common?
   3. What piece of information, what reference point, can you elegantly weave into the conversation, signalling ‘I get where you are coming from?’

Searching for clues of what you have in common, like a detective, takes time, but it’s so worth it. It helps you build rapport. It gets the interview off to a good start. It helps level the playing field. It is not stalking – it is what you are expected to do.

1. **Address the company’s pain points**. You need to know the company inside out. What’s their situation? What are they struggling with? How do they perform in comparison to their competitors? Who are their customers? What pressure are they under? Prepare, prepare, prepare. When you show how well you know the industry, the company, their competitors and their struggles - *and* how you can help them resolve their issues - age becomes less of a factor. It’s your expertise that counts. Because what you offer is so brilliant, they just have to have it.
2. **Get on the same wavelength.** What world does your interviewer live in – and how do you get a glimpse of it before the interview? This sounds a bit creepy, but it is not meant to. What magazines do they read? What music do they listen to? What films do they watch? What video games do they play? What apps do they like? (And if you think this is nonsense, here is a reminder of software engineers coding this information into online applications to screen older candidates out – add link for evidence). So get into the head of your interviewer. Read their magazines, listen to some of their music, and find out what that crazy new game is that everyone talks about. Why? So you understand their thinking, their language, their reference points. You want a job, so you need to adapt.
3. **Dress to impress.** As an experienced professional you will have your own idea about what ‘looking professional’ means. Bear in mind that your interviewer might have different ideas. A client of mine, very comfortable in a corporate environment, went for an interview in a technology start-up. Wearing a suit and shirt, no tie, he felt he had made a real effort to dress down. The issue? Same industry sector, different (non-corporate) culture and dress code. If you show up in a suit, and everyone else arrives in jeans and t-shirt, you have just proved that you don’t fit in.
4. **Wear your age with pride**. You can’t pretend you are 40 when you are 55 or 60. Nor should you, in my books. You are who you are. You want a job based on merit, not on your youthful looks. Of course you want to show up looking your best, but far are you prepared to go? You will have seen advice elsewhere to dye your hair to hide the grey or to go for cosmetic surgery to hide your wrinkles and flabby skin. Seriously? Unless you want to alter your appearance anyway, I’d say ‘nonsense to that - certainly not just to get a job’. Isn’t it time to accept Douglas MacArthur’s motto. ‘Age wrinkles the body. Quitting wrinkles the soul.’

So these are my 8 tips. I am curious about what has worked for you? What tips do you have to engage with interviewers half your age? Please share your suggestions in the comment box below!