

20 Ways Older Workers Can Sell Themselves

Older workers don't need to be defensive about their age—they've got so many selling points

By Liz Wolgemuth

Older workers often subscribe to certain myths about themselves, and they may end up hiding their age or apologizing for it when they search for a job. Increasingly, too, the contrasts between people in their 50s and 60s and younger millennial workers have caused a strange kind of generational workplace clash. The truth is, the American workforce needs the input of both, and baby boomers have a vast assortment of strengths to recommend them.

If you're an older worker, take note of your many selling points:

1. You understand recessions: Older workers have seen hard times before—the bursting of the 1990s tech bubble, recession in the early 1980s, the oil crisis of the mid-1970s—and they understand that businesses have to adjust. Knowing, too, that expansions always follow, older workers can bring a steady perspective to a jumpy workplace.

2. You have a healthy fear of slowdowns: Sure, you've seen them before. Older workers' steadiness can be accompanied by a fair dose of worry: You know that downturns can last for long periods of time, and you've witnessed the obliteration of job security, so you know that you need to be increasingly ready and willing to do what it takes to keep your job.

3. You're willing to work part time: Older workers most crave flexibility, according to a RetirementJobs.com survey. Many want to spend more of their time doing things they enjoy—traveling, perhaps, or playing with their grandkids—and they're often willing to accept a part-time schedule or reduced hours. As employers increasingly cut back on hours, a willingness to be flexible can make a job seeker more attractive to a greater variety of companies.

4. You have real-life experience: Today, employers need workers who can hit the ground running, and older workers have more real-world, less theoretical experience,

says John Challenger of Challenger Gray & Christmas. "They've been there before and seen more situations," Challenger says.

5. You want to be challenged: Forget resting on your laurels—a Penn State study found that challenging work is the thing that older workers want most.

6. You know that tech savvy isn't everything: There will be younger workers with greater expertise in computer programs, social networking, and new tech trends—but you can sell yourself on the alternative. Businesses can't rely solely on tech savvy; they also need people with sales and leadership skills. You can provide support for the young tech talents.

7. You don't need constant feedback: Ron Alsop, author of *The Trophy Kids Grow Up*, reports that millennial workers may want weekly, or even daily, evaluations from their employers. Earlier in your career, you probably wanted lots of feedback, too. Today, you've got a pretty good handle on your value, and you're more confident in your abilities.

8. You're healthier: A recent study by employee assistance program provider ComPsych found that older workers—in their 50s or 60s—are likelier to have healthy diets, exercise regularly and have lower stress levels than workers in their 30s.

9. You can manage yourself: A recent study by TalentSmart, a provider of psychological assessments, found that self-management skills seem to increase with age. TalentSmart said that "60-year-olds scored higher than 50-year-olds, who scored higher than 40-year-olds, and so on."

10. You're able to control your emotions: The same TalentSmart study found that when it comes to managing emotions, "baby boomers reign supreme." Other studies show older workers have low levels of work-related stress. A cool head and calm demeanor can make a major difference in workplace dynamics during hard times.

11. Your network is bigger: All those years of networking groups and Chamber of Commerce meetings haven't been for nothing. You've got deep reserves of friends, colleagues, and contacts in the community. That's an asset to an employer who's

trying to get out of a sales rut. It's also helpful to a hiring manager who wants to check out your reputation.

12. You're loyal: Take Colorado, for example, where older workers have the lowest turnover rate among working groups. Borders Group began making older workers a bigger percentage of its employee mix in the 1990s, when it found that workers over age 50 were staying longer with their jobs and were happier in them.

13. You're not competing for a top spot: You're working more for steady income now—not to climb the ladder. Female baby boomers were more likely to think "good for her/him," if a competitor won a new contract or client, according to a recent American Express study of female business owners.

14. You've been green a long time: Companies are increasingly using their environmental sensitivity as a selling point, and while gen Y is often characterized as the most passionately "green" age group, many older workers were raised with green principles: using a pencil down to the nub, repairing holes and worn spots in clothes, reusing jars and using little (or no) air conditioning. See you were green before it was cool.

15. You're a team player: Older workers tend to be settled and comfortable in their own skin, John Challenger says. Those tendencies can help them fit in and work as part of a team more easily.

16. You're willing to learn: Older workers actually exhibit a greater willingness to learn than younger workers, according to a 2005 study by a Louisiana State University professor. Workers in their 50s and 60s are even more committed to technological change, the study found.

17. You're reliable: You'll get your work done. It sounds simple, but that's a huge asset for an employer. A 1998 survey by the National Council on the Aging found that 97 percent of the employers surveyed said older workers were thorough and reliable in completing their work.

18. You're more satisfied with your job and your benefits: Job satisfaction appears to increase with age, and workers ages 65 and older tend to be the most satisfied with

the work they're doing. A University of Chicago study published last year found that 71 percent of the 65-plus group was very satisfied with their work, compared with 42 percent of those ages 18 to 29.

19. You're no one-trick pony: Over their careers, many workers have spent time in multiple industries, Challenger notes, and that ability to cross-pollinate is highly useful to employers right now.

20. You're cheaper: This isn't always true, but if you're starting someplace new, you're likely to be cheaper. (Or you should consider taking a cut in pay or hours where you're currently working.) After all, you aren't providing for a gaggle of kids anymore, and you may be looking for a more flexible schedule of reduced hours. Many seniors just need some income now to supplement their suffering investments.