

IS IT YOUR AGE OR YOUR ATTITUDE?

You can't turn back the clock, but you can show hiring managers your passion and record of results.

May 10, 2010
By Joe Turner

If you're older than 50 years old, it often seems the deck is stacked against you.

Following last year's ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in [Gross v. FBL Financial Services Inc.](#), which put the burden of proof on the plaintiff in age-discrimination cases, even the government seems out to get you — or, at the very least, unwilling to help.

People are angry about the treatment of workers over 50 years old because most of us know we must work well into our 60s before we can retire. But recent research indicates few of us actually want to work well into our 60s — and that tendency may help explain, if not excuse, employers' prejudices.

Dr. David DeLong of research and consulting firm DeLong & Associates conducted a study of older workers and hiring traits titled "Buddy Can You Spare a Job?" for the Metlife Mature Market Institute. The report found most older workers felt financial pressure to work into their 60s, but few worked out of a desire to do so. In turn, employers fear they're likely to hire employees who are less passionate about their work than their younger counterparts.

This brings up an interesting question to ask yourself at this stage of your career: How passionate are you about your work? And how could that passion affect your ability to find a job?

Can you find something that you really care about in your work? Your passion (or lack thereof) will show during the interview. So Step One is to consider your own commitment to your current job. How passionate *are* you?

Find your passion, then the job

If you no longer have passion for your current work, maybe it's time for some self-examination. While you've accumulated experience in a number of areas over the years, it may be time to redefine and refocus your story.

Sure, you might be good at a lot of things, but ask yourself this question, "Of all the roles and capabilities, what brings me the most joy at this point in my life?" Find that one thing that you're best at and focus on it. If any of your duties and experiences doesn't directly address that job title's requirements, then don't emphasize them. Of course, you'll need a dose of realism, so test the market for this role.

Remember, this is your story. Tell it your way. You want to focus your resume to reflect yourself in the most positive, powerful way possible. That means magnifying only the aspects of your background that are relevant to your newly focused career goal and passion. For help with this stage, you might want to consult with a career coach or advisor.

Sell results, not years

Once you've identified your goals, you may need to sell them differently from the way you did in the past.

Not too long ago, you could win a job just by talking about your skills or the 15 years you spent working at a particular job. Hiring managers today are looking for results, not years. Talk the

language an employer understands and appreciates: return on investment. Instead of citing 20 years of experience, identify your benefits to the employer and put them into monetary terms. Support your accomplishments with facts that are benefit-based. Sell them on the way your work has helped your employers realize value.

Money talks, and it talks loudly. The good news is that money can trump age. As an employee, you either make money or save money for your employer. Boil your job duties down to answer how many ways you've helped an employer either to make money, save money or save time. Be prepared to demonstrate instances where you've already achieved this.

For example, if you're an operations manager, you could include an achievement bullet that might read something like this:

Reduced our payroll cost by \$1,125 per week by reducing supervising doctor hours from five nights a week to only two nights.

When you do this, you're leveling the playing field by talking money, a subject near and dear to the heart of employers. They'll think less about age differences and more about the real problems they're facing.

You can't eliminate age bias in the workplace, but you can overcome a big hurdle, which is the perception that as an older worker, you lack the passion of a younger worker. You may not be able to regenerate a lost passion, but you can at least develop a renewed enthusiasm and focus on what you want as a job hunter. A more effective sales pitch will go a long way toward overcoming old perceptions about age and indifference.