

Too old to be hired?

Published: May 11, 2011 10:49 AM

By Beth Braccio Hering CareerBuilder

When Anna Klenman and her boyfriend moved to [Los Angeles](#), they decided to try a local temp service for employment opportunities. Her boyfriend went in one day and was told, "We have lots of jobs. We'll get you placed right away." He was working in less than 48 hours. Encouraged, Klenman went in soon afterward and was interviewed by the very same client-placement manager. But instead of an enthusiastic response, Klenman was told, "It's a difficult market. You should apply to as many other temp services as you can."

Why the difference in attitude? Klenman contends it was because she is significantly older than her boyfriend. "It's a competitive market, and temp services want to supply companies with young, fresh faces," Klenman says. "If a temp service provides tired, older workers to their clients, they won't get called back; it's a matter of survival for them."

While recent economic woes have presented problems for myriad workers, older job seekers have been among the hardest hit. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the average length of [unemployment](#) for a jobless person in 2009 was 24.4 weeks. For job seekers ages 16-24, this figure was only 19.9 weeks, but it increased to 25.3 weeks for ages 25-54 and to 29.5 weeks for those over 55.

The [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) found there was a 33 percent increase in the amount of age discrimination complaints processed in the past two fiscal years combined, but many potential victims do not want to pursue the legal route. Instead, what they really want is a fair shot at finding employment. Take a look at what some people are doing to strengthen candidacy.

Update your look

Employers want to hire workers who project an energetic, positive image. While a 40-something is unlikely to fool many by trying to look 22 again, taking steps to appear healthy, fashionable and modern can leave a good impression.

Chris Hauri, founder of Mirror Image -- an image and identity consultancy that gives workshops for women over 50 in the [Chicago](#) area -- offers these tips for improving "freshness":

- Whiten your teeth.
- Carry a contemporary bag.

- Don't wear suits, matched outfits or panty hose; do wear a properly fitted bra.
- Don't go overboard on makeup to try to appear younger. Instead, try a primer to smooth wrinkles and a tanner to look healthier.
- Get a fresh hairstyle, possibly including color and highlights.

"In a tight job market, everyone is looking for a competitive advantage," says **Dr. Michelle Yagoda**, senior attending facial plastic surgeon at Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital in New York City. "It is only human nature that an employer who is choosing between two equally qualified candidates for a position might consider appearance as a contributing factor in her decision."

Yagoda has noticed a recent increase in noninvasive procedures such as Botox/Dysport and fillers. "These procedures are less expensive (than surgery) in terms of time and dollars spent and are able to provide subtle, natural and immediate improvements in appearance with little or no down time."

Use experience to your advantage

"There is no doubt that age is hurting my chances for employment," says Shirley Green of Arvada, Colo. "It is quite evident from the résumé that one is over a certain age. After all, I was with one company for 25 years. The math is easy to do!" She has even been told point blank by a hirer, "We don't like older people in such a position."

While job seekers can try such tactics as eliminating dates or omitting early experiences to look "younger" on paper, employers sometimes feel tricked when a person who is older than expected shows up for an interview. Richard Deems, co-author of "Make Job Loss Work for You," suggests building a "functional résumé" instead.

"After age 50, decision-makers are interested in what a person has accomplished in past positions. Identify your three best skills and select five to seven results for each heading. It's not 'Managed an accounting department' but 'Reduced overhead by more than 17 percent through implementing new accounting procedures.' That gets decision-makers' attention."

Deems also recommends paying attention to positions at smaller companies since these organizations are "usually less concerned about age than about getting the job done."

Lastly, he urges older workers to take full advantage of one of their greatest assets: contacts. More life experience means a greater personal network (plus all the people your contacts may know), so spend less time fretting over age and more time getting out there making direct contact with people who will value what you can bring to the workplace.

Source: <http://www.newsday.com/classifieds/jobs/too-old-to-be-hired-1.2869900>

