



Why Didn't I Get the Job? How to Interview When You Are Decades Older Than Your Interviewer

Would you communicate with a 30 year old differently than a 50 year old? Would both age groups hear the same words, yet interpret them differently? This is where an interview frequently disconnects, the interviewee is so wrapped up in their own inner dialogue they never consider the interviewer's perspective.

Here's a perfect example. Sam has 20 years experience and is 47 years old. He is interviewing with Larry who is 30 years old. After Sam's interview, he calls and says,

"I told Larry I want to work 18 hour days in turbo drives for the next five to seven years, then start to wind down".

Is Sam saying he wants to retire in five to seven years? Is he saying he wants to slow down, have less responsibility, or work shorter days? What does he mean, "work in turbo drive for the near future?"

From Sam's perspective he thinks he is leveraging his assets (talents, skill, intellect, etc.). If you are strategic in leveraging your career then the best may be ahead of you, not behind you. Your dreams are not beyond reach.

However, Sam is interviewing with Larry who is 30 years old. Larry heard Sam wants to work for another five to seven years, then retire. Is that what Sam meant? No.

When a 30 year old interviews a 47 year old, he will be concerned about his return on investment, his tenure, his flexibility, and his ability to take direction from someone much younger than he. Therefore, you must consider the interviewer's age, perspective, experience, and biases. The point is, Sam should never have used those words, "work in

turbo drive then start to wind down." Why? Because nothing Sam said after that phrase was heard. Larry shut down.

Another example is John. John had been head of sales for two firms over the past eighteen years. He was with one company for 16 years, and another company for six months. However, John's company was acquired two years ago which left him unemployed. During our interview, I asked him to share with me his recent job hunt experiences.

John said, "I interviewed recently with a 40-year old CEO and he asked me how many years I thought I had left in me".

John was oblivious to what these comments meant and why he wasn't invited back for a second interview. He didn't see the link his 2-year unemployment. What do you hear in the CEO's comment? Prior to my first face-to-face meeting with John, I assumed that he was in the same age range as me, around 50.

Upon meeting John, I was surprised to find a man that looked at least 60 years old. Is that a problem? No. However, when you are interviewing you need to consider the audience.

As Shakespeare said in *As you like it*, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women are merely players".

So back to the CEO's comment. The CEO is 40 years old, John is 48; but looks 60. The CEO says, "how many years do you have left in you"? What are his concerns? John's energy? Can he do the job and if so, for how long? Is he concerned about retirement, or his return on investment, his impact on a youthful organization? Are the CEO's concerns legitimate? Yes.

My point is being cognizant of your interviewer's age and how to address your interviewer's issues. Address the obvious. If you don't address the pink elephant crushing your skull, what are you telling the interviewer? That you live in LaLa Land? Absolutely.

Address the obvious. Put it on the table and address it. What better way to address the CEO's comment than,

"It is interesting you asked how many years I have left in me. People who don't know-- frequently think I am 60, when in fact, I am in my 40s. In this field that's probably been one of my greatest strengths. My grey hair--though my wife hates it--it lends great credibility with my clients. As you know, people in the institutional asset management business have a tendency to trust older people. I look for the silver lining in any negatives in life. Another great advantage to aging--called wisdom."

Enhance your message with wit and a quote. Go on with,

"You know, Shakespeare addressed the age issue best in Othello, 'You shall command more with years than with your weapons.'"

Do not be glib in addressing your interviewer's perspective. Address your interviewer's frame of reference, seek clarity and never assume. State the obvious,

"I want to make sure I understand your concerns. Earlier you questioned how many years I have left in me. Help me understand what you meant by the question. Are you concerned about your return on investment, how close I am to retirement, my energy, potential tenure, or my impact on the organization and with clients? Do you have concerns about my energy level?"

If the interviewer is caught off guard, or surprised, allay his fears with a statement such as,

"If I were in your shoes, I can understand why you might be concerned about some of those issues.

Listen to what his concerns are. Write down his issues, then go back and address each one. Speak to your passion, depth of experience, energy level and tenure. Close with grace and style with a comment such as,

"You asked me earlier in our conversation about my strengths, which I said are tenacity, perseverance and determination. As a determined prospective employee, I genuinely want this job. Are there any additional concerns you have that I can specifically address?"

Packaging yourself adroitly during the interview process is critical to successful employment. Discover as much as you can about the interviewer prior to your meeting and edit your script accordingly. Write out an interview script; give it to someone else to read and practice. Frequently, the candidate that gets the job is not the most talented or works the hardest. It is the candidate that is best prepared. Managing potential land mines effortlessly demonstrates talent.

I think George Bernard Shaw said it best, "Life isn't about finding yourself, it's about creating yourself."

And don't forget the hand written thank you note! Now go get 'em!

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