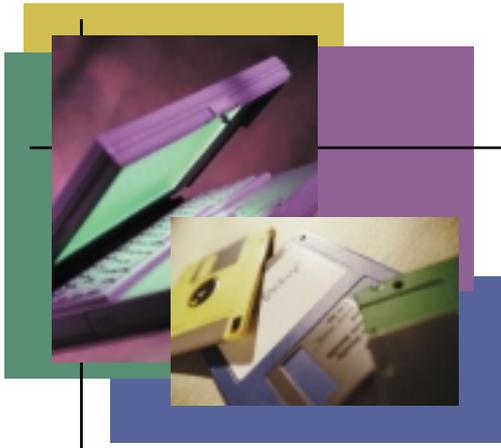


# Career Corner

BY RICK NASHLEANAS

## How to Fight Age Discrimination



**W**elcome to the "Career Corner"! Whether you have been laid off, are trying to find a new position while working, or you are worried about what would happen if you would need to look for a job, this column will help you navigate the job seeking, job negotiating, and job retention strategies you should use. If you have a specific career-related question, email it to me at [ask-rick@monarchtech.com](mailto:ask-rick@monarchtech.com) and look for the response in NaSPA's E-News.

Here's your impression of how the interview process unfolded: The recruiter who initially called you was excited at how well your qualifications matched the position requirements. The telephone interviews went well and you were invited on site. When you visited, things seemed to go OK, but you felt that something was not quite right. Perhaps you were being overly sensitive.

Several days later, you get the word that you did not get the job. You have a sneaking suspicion that the people who you met might have thought that you were "too old," but you don't have anything to back up that feeling.

Interestingly enough, there is research available on age discrimination in the layoff process, but there is not much data available on age discrimination in the hiring process. It is just too difficult to obtain. In addition, it can be hidden too easily. There are too many other factors; no two candidates are the same, so other factors could be involved.

I can tell you from personal experience that age discrimination is alive and well in the hiring process. I have been told outright by a hiring manager that a candidate was "too old" for the position.

Unfortunately, age discrimination is especially prevalent in the tech world. Mainframers face it uniquely. If you have been in IT for a while, you are suddenly

dumb and can't learn anything new. If you are a mainframe manager, you could easily be passed over for a management position in another area because it contains non-mainframe technology. I have even found that hiring managers seem to prefer younger systems programmers to deal with technologies such as MQSeries or WebSphere!

I know some of these people. They are not evil. Some don't realize that they are doing it. Some feel they are trying to fit in their corporate culture. Some simply don't have much hiring experience. No matter the reason, how can you fight age discrimination when you are trying to get a job?

**Ever wonder if you didn't get a job due to your age? You will probably never find out, but you can set the stage for your next interview so it will not happen again.**

- First, an appropriate mindset is necessary. If age discrimination in the hiring process is part of the organization's culture, you should be prepared to walk away. Even if they hired you, you probably wouldn't be given the opportunity to be successful anyway. However, given the current job market, walking away might not be an

option. Suggesting a contract or contract-to-hire situation might be an option. In the contracting world, age is not as important as producing the deliverables.

- During the interview process, you must explicitly work against the typical stereotypes of an old man or woman. Be enthusiastic. Be intellectually quick. Be attentive. Be enthusiastic. Be positive. Most importantly, be yourself.
- If you feel there are serious, unanswered questions about age-related issues, be prepared to offer information to put those concerns to rest. Offer your (truthful) plans about retirement. Cite your strong work history and good health. Give examples of your productivity, work ethic, loyalty, and ability to learn.
- Give the hiring manager you would be working for examples of the advantages you offer as an older worker: no dependent children to take you away from the job, immediate productivity, attention to detail, independent problem solving skills, etc.
- If you use a third-party recruiter, be sure that he or she is sensitive to these issues and is paving the way for a successful on-site interview. Let the recruiter identify any managers who might cause a problem in this area.

Now, I must say that I have placed my fair share of OS/390 specialists who are over 55, over 60, and even over 65. To me, the hiring manager makes all the difference. Hiring managers who are almost blind to the candidate's age can get tremendous experience and talent. Not only can these hiring managers recruit this talent, but they are also successful at retaining these

professionals. You need to interview the hiring manager as much as he or she is interviewing you.

I have personally experienced some of the isolated vignettes that give older IT workers a bad reputation. An older candidate once asked me if the hiring manager knew how old he was. I said, "No, does it matter?" At the time, he responded that it didn't matter to him, but he later declined an on-site interview because he decided to retire!

In my experience, you will not be able to actually "fight" age discrimination. If a hiring manager really doesn't want to hire you, you probably aren't going to change that. However, you can break stereotypes, address age-related concerns, and manage the process so age is no longer a consideration.

*Do you have an age discrimination experience or problem? Email it to Rick at [ask-rick@monarchtech.com](mailto:ask-rick@monarchtech.com). You can also catch Rick's new career advice column, "Ask Rick," which appears in the bi-weekly **NaSPA E-News**. If you would like to receive the **NaSPA E-News**, email your request to [drockhill@naspa.com](mailto:drockhill@naspa.com).* 



*After founding, growing and selling an international mainframe software company, Rick now runs Monarch Technology*

*— [www.monarchtech.com](http://www.monarchtech.com) — a national recruiting firm specializing in mainframe and software company positions.*