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Ageism in the Workplace: Breaking Barriers and Embracing Experience (with a Side of Wit)

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Introduction

Ageism—the discrimination based on age—continues to be a persistent issue in workplaces across industries. While diversity and inclusion efforts have made strides in areas like gender and race, age discrimination remains the stubborn grandparent of workplace biases—ignored, underestimated, but always present.

Now, let's add another layer to the discussion. With shifts in political administrations, many federal employees are unexpectedly finding themselves back on the job market. If you've recently been handed a pink slip courtesy of government restructuring, don't panic—these tips will help you turn your experience into an advantage in your next job search.

The Reality of Ageism: Facts and Figures

Ageism manifests in various ways, from hiring discrimination to workplace exclusion. Many companies prioritize hiring younger employees under the assumption that they bring more energy, innovation, and adaptability. But let's be real—there are plenty of young employees nodding off in morning meetings and plenty of seasoned professionals who could run circles around them.

Key Statistics on Workplace Ageism:

- A 2022 report from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) found that age discrimination complaints made up nearly 25% of all workplace discrimination claims.
According to AARP, 58% of workers believe age discrimination starts as early as age 50—because apparently, turning 50 is now the

equivalent of becoming a fossil.

- Research from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) indicates that 76% of older job seekers say their age is a barrier to finding new employment.
- A study by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) found that older women face compounded discrimination, dealing with both gender and age biases. Double whammy!
- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that unemployment rates for workers aged 55 and older remain higher than for younger employees, even in times of economic growth.

Some companies outright avoid hiring older workers, while others use coded language in job descriptions, such as “seeking a dynamic and energetic candidate,” which roughly translates to “If you remember dial-up internet, don’t bother applying.”

Strategies for Federal Employees Entering the Private Sector

Whether your federal job has been cut or you’re proactively looking for new opportunities, transitioning into the private sector requires a strategic approach. Here’s how you can make yourself stand out:

Optimizing Your Resume

- **Ditch the Government Jargon:** Federal job titles and descriptions don’t always translate well into private-sector roles. Focus on skills and impact rather than bureaucratic terms.
- **Highlight Transferable Skills:** Project management, policy analysis, risk mitigation—these are valuable in private industry roles. Make them shine.
- **Keep it Concise:** Unlike federal resumes, private-sector resumes should be no longer than two pages. Recruiters don’t have time for a 10-page SF-50 breakdown.

Revamping Your LinkedIn Profile

- **Update Your Headline:** Instead of “Federal Program Analyst,” try “Strategic Operations & Risk Management Professional.” Sell your expertise.
- **Add a Compelling Summary:** This isn’t a cover letter—make it engaging. Highlight your adaptability, leadership, and achievements in a digestible way.
- **Engage in Conversations:** Post industry-related insights, comment on posts, and connect with people outside of government circles. Networking is key.

Nailing the Interview

- **Prepare for the ‘Government Stereotype’ Questions:** Hiring managers may assume federal employees are slow-moving or rigid. Counter this by sharing examples of fast-paced problem-solving, cross-functional teamwork, and efficiency improvements.
- **Practice the Private-Sector Mindset:** Think in terms of profits, customer impact, and innovation rather than compliance and regulations.
- **Showcase Your Adaptability:** Demonstrate how you’ve embraced technology, led change initiatives, or worked with diverse stakeholders.

The Bigger Picture: Why Employers Should Care About Experience

For employers still hesitant about hiring seasoned professionals, here's a reality check:

- **Loss of Institutional Knowledge:** Experienced workers know things—important things—like how to navigate bureaucracy, manage crises, and keep projects on track.
- **Diverse Teams Perform Better:** Studies show that companies with multi-generational teams outperform their age-segregated counterparts.
- **Higher Retention Rates:** While younger employees are more likely to job-hop, seasoned professionals offer stability and long-term commitment.
- **Avoiding Legal and Reputational Risks:** Age discrimination lawsuits are on the rise. It's smarter (and cheaper) to hire inclusively than to fight lawsuits.

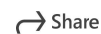
Final Thoughts: Embrace the Change, Own Your Value

Ageism in the workplace is like an outdated company policy—annoying, counterproductive, and in need of immediate revision. But that doesn't mean you have to let it hold you back. If you're a federal employee navigating an unexpected career shift, remember: your experience is an asset, not a liability.

By focusing on resume optimization, LinkedIn branding, and confident interviewing, you'll position yourself as the top-tier professional you are. The private sector isn't a foreign land—it just speaks a slightly different language. Learn it, own it, and show them why experience matters.

#Ageism #WorkplaceDiversity #CareerChange #JobSearch #ResumeTips
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