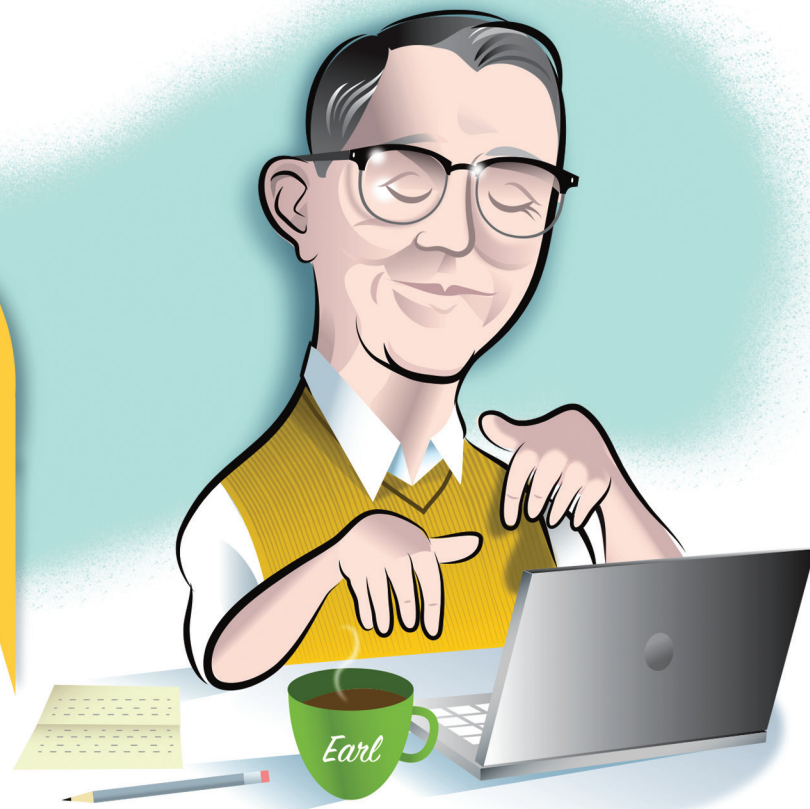


# ASK Earl



## Advice from the Experts at the Hankamer School of Business

*If you could ask your old Baylor Business professors business and work-related questions today, what would you ask? A nod to the namesake of the Hankamer School of Business, Earl Hankamer, the "Ask Earl" advice column provides an opportunity for Baylor Business professors to share their knowledge and expertise with Baylor Business Review readers.*

### Q "How does one overcome age discrimination in the workplace?"

My highly qualified, educated and respected husband has been laid off twice in the past five years after turning 50 years old. I have been turned down numerous times for jobs I am overqualified for, just trying to obtain any professional job where my business degree is required. Both of us have outstanding résumés with extensive experience in our professional fields. We are both now 50+ years of age, and terribly underemployed as hourly workers—making a paltry fraction of our former salaries. By law, one cannot be told by HR (human resources) that they are searching for someone of a different skin color, gender, religion or sexual preference. However, discrimination based on middle age is very real in the workplace."

—Lee | The Woodlands, Texas

**A** As someone who has recently experienced what you are referring to, I sympathize with your dilemma. I believe it is very prevalent in today's job market as businesses struggle to reduce cost. It typically comes in the form of letting people with higher wages go and replacing them with less experienced or entry level people who can be paid much less.

My advice is the same I give to students who are looking for their first job and experience similar biases on the opposite end of the age spectrum. As we approach searching for jobs, we must constantly adjust our expectations, résumés and interviewing stories to fit the situation, and the expectations and biases of the specific job market.

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There is not enough room here to write about the many situations that can affect our job expectations, but I can briefly address the subject of résumés and interviewing stories. For résumés, we must make them age neutral and tailor them for each specific job. For example, in my case, saying I have 40+ years of experience immediately tells the reader my approximate age, so

I recommend leaving out statements like these. When adding our skills and accomplishments, we must adjust them to the position, so we present ourselves as current for the specific job requirements and not overly qualified. Most résumés today are first looked at by a computer and, if selected, then an HR specialist. In both cases, they look for the highest percentage of résumé match to the specific job requirements before it is passed to a hiring manager.

Just like when we were going after our first job, we need to adjust our interviewing stories. For our first jobs, we had to explain why a 20-year-old with little-to-no experience was the person they needed. Now, we need to explain why a 50- or 60-year-old with vast amounts of experience is the person they need. I recommend brainstorming with your kids and friends about the biases and concerns we have or have had about older people in the workplace. Be honest. Then, use that list to adjust interviewing stories to overcome those biases and concerns.

In conclusion, great résumés with amazing accomplishments and skills are only good if the job you're applying for needs those things, and we must be able to convincingly answer why we are the right person for the job in a way that puts the interviewer at ease with their age biases and concerns. 📧

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