

## JOB SEARCH

## An Aging Work Force: New Opportunities for Older Execs

As older workers stave off retirement or re-enter the job search, many are turning their age to their advantage and overcoming age discrimination.

By Sean Gallagher

**P**ETE KRESKY EXEMPLIFIES a new breed of job seeker. He is 70 years old. He said he's had three distinct careers and retired once already. But right now he's looking for work.

The percentage of workers age 50 and older is expected to rise 52 percent in the next year as more Americans remain longer in the work force and the job search. Like TheLadders' member Kresky, many

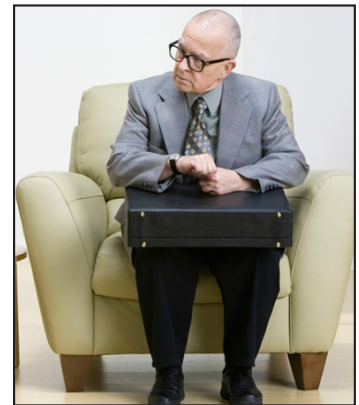
are re-entering the job search after resigning from it once already.

"Retirement that early is really a bummer," Kresky said. He sold his business and retired six years ago, but felt unproductive without a job. "I'm a business guy; I need to be in business."

For others, the decision to postpone or cancel retirement after it has begun is financial. There are many factors that

prompt this move: Your mortgage has become more costly, your retirement savings was depleted by the decline in the stock market, your adult children now need support or your aging parents have their own trouble making ends meet.

The result is a work force and pool of job seekers older than ever and desperate to overcome age discrimination in the hunt for work.



### Aging in the Work Force, Staying in the Game

By Matthew Rothenberg, Editor-in-Chief, TheLadders.com

**T**O FIND THE STORIES that matter most to our readers, TheLadders' editorial team reviews every piece of mail that comes into our customer-service department. And every day, we read new stories of older workers grappling with the slippery issues of age discrimination and maintaining their edge against younger competitors.

Reporter Sean Gallagher tackled these topics head on, interviewing some of our job seekers as well as a senior attorney with the AARP.

The bad news: These challenges aren't going away, and — legal or not — age discrimination is something you'll have to prepare for when tun-

ing up your networking tactics, your resume and your interview skills.

The good news, at least for your competitive positioning: As Sean notes, the percentage of workers age 50 and older is expected to rise 52 percent in the next year. You are not alone — and your ranks are growing. ■

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#### What did you think of this package?

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“The economy obviously is shedding jobs at a slightly decreasing rate but still a tremendously high level,” said Dan Kohrman, a senior attorney at AARP who oversees age-discrimination cases. “Our experience at AARP is that whenever there’s a downturn even much milder than this, the proportion of workers who lose their jobs who are older workers is greater, is disproportionate. And although older workers (may sometimes be costlier than other candidates), that’s almost never the explanation.”

### Proving age discrimination

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has reported a significant, recent increase in age-discrimination complaints. While the number of complaints filed for age has steadily increased for the past 10 years, they jumped 25.8 percent in 2008. And those complaints are just for those who already have a job. Age discrimination on the job search is less visible and rarely reported, Kohrman said.

“When you’re applying for jobs — the difficulty there is it’s frequently hard to tell if you’ve been discriminated against,” Kohrman said. “You can get an interview; you can get a friendly interview, but you can also get an interviewer who takes one look at your resume and your appearance and says to themselves, ‘Too old,’ and you’ll never know.”

AARP conducts sting operations to test hiring organizations for age discrimination and the results are clear, Kohrman said.

“The evidence seems pretty clear and dramatic that the treatment of job applicants is different for older workers, given all other circumstances being equal. But it’s hard to detect.”

Older workers also have, on average, a much longer job search than their younger counterparts, he said. “It can be more than a year right now.”

Chuck Jordan’s last job search lasted more than a year. Jordan worked 28 years as a salesman for a major technology company’s federal government sales group before he retired. But six months after retiring, he was back on the job search.

“For multiple reasons, like kids going to college, it was appropriate for me to keep bringing in some money,” he told TheLadders.

Over the next four years, Jordan had three jobs and finally quit his job at a technology company in California that moved him to a sales territory that had him traveling “100 percent of the time.” He decided to take some time off, thinking he could easily re-enter the work force when he was ready.

“But then I realized that was not the case, and the environment had changed a ton,” he said. “It was incredibly competitive trying to find a job. So I had an absence of more than a year out of the marketplace. It was traumatic because I spent a lot of energy looking.”

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## Tips For Beating the “Age Filter”

Age discrimination is an issue — but you can prevail by not making it a bigger one.

By Sean Gallagher

**P**ETE KRESKY CAN’T REALLY say he’s experienced blatant age discrimination, but the 70-year-old marketing executive and job seeker said he suspects it’s there.

“I’ve never personally been confronted with my age, but I know they figure it out, and they just don’t call.”

The AARP said it regularly tests companies and has documented

instances when companies tend to prefer to call younger candidates than those aged 50 and older, even when all other factors are equal.

So how do you get through the filter that seems to screen out older job candidates?

The best way to keep age from being a factor in your job search is not to make it an issue early, said

Dan Kohrman, a senior attorney at AARP who oversees age-discrimination cases. “What we say is, ‘Don’t invite consideration of your age’ because it’s going to happen in the ordinary course in many instances anyway.”

### Age and your resume

One way to keep from getting screened out early is by tuning your

## Age vs. experience

Jordan said he thought of his experience, age and maturity as an advantage in the marketplace when he was competing for jobs against younger candidates and believes it was eventually what helped him land his current job, but “for the vast majority of my conversations and interviews, I think I was fighting an uphill battle.”

Kresky also said he thought his age was a handicap, despite his energy. “The young are ruling the world, and they really think they know it all so they don’t really need us,” he said. “I’ve never personally been confronted with my age, but I know they figure it out, and they just don’t call.

“It’s a shame because I’m on top of my game, and I’m pretty bright, and I know there are a lot of guys and gals who can offer an awful lot to some of these young people who really... have no idea and think they know everything themselves.”

Part of the reason older workers face trouble, Kohrman said, is the stereotypes employers have.

“(Some employers think) if you have a long career and a lot of experience, you have to get a salary equal to the highest salary you’ve ever had, which is not true,” he said. The perception, he said, “is that if you can’t equal the best job you’ve ever had, you’ll never be happy.”

That’s precisely how Jordan read the difficulties he had in his job search. “People thought they could find other candidates who were willing to work for a lot less, so I think that (my experience) was a disadvantage,” he said.

## Using age to your advantage

One way to get around the stereotypes of age is to promote a new one, Kresky said. He believes that many older workers don’t need the large salaries they once did, and employers might see them as a bargain.

“I don’t think I need the 30-year-old’s salary like they do. I don’t think we need that big a money hit,” he said. “I don’t say we come by the cheap, but we would be less expensive with just as much enthusiasm and knowledge, and just as much or more experience. So we bring a lot to the table, frugally. I think it’s a good sell, from a business standpoint to bring the 60- and 70-year-olds in.”

Making that case — and showing the passion and energy you’ve still got at your command — may be one of the best marketing tools you have at your disposal. But your network may be the best way to get you through the doors in the first place, Kresky said.

“Let people know that you’re back, if that’s right, from retirement,” he said. “If you let the people with the kind of businesses you were in before, associates and former relationships know (you’re looking), that’s probably the best avenue for getting a response.” ■

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—Pete Kresky

resume, Kohrman said. Eliminate the year from any degrees and early jobs and focus on more recent experience.

Don’t be deceptive or dishonest, but “don’t offer very old experience on your resume, even if it’s impressive,” Kohrman said. “At some point, the very length of your resume may count against you.”

You may want to narrow the scope of your resume down to show specific expertise and focus on jobs that match what makes you unique.

“It wasn’t until toward the end of the process that I started to recog-

nize the value of my uniqueness and started ignoring the other things that were out there,” said Chuck Jordan, a job seeker who had retired from his job as a technology salesman but decided to re-enter the work force just six months later.

He started focusing on jobs that played to his strengths as an expert in selling to the federal government and landed a position soon after.

## Age and the interview

Even with a focused resume that plays down dates, you can’t hide your age at the interview, and there’s noth-

ing that precludes a potential employer from asking your age. “If an employer is really digging into those age issues,” Kohrman said, “try some gentle way of fending off that line of questioning.

“Give something from your background that demonstrates that (you) have attributes consistent with vigor and energy and creativity and initiative and insight — all those things that some employers think only younger workers have — that counters the stereotypes,” Kohrman told TheLadders. ■

## HIRED!

# Retired Salesman Returns to the Job-Search Fray

After his 401(k) contracted, Chuck Jordan re-entered the work force — twice. He learned that a targeted search works better than a shotgun approach.

By Sharon Linsench

CHUCK JORDAN, 56, WAS RETIRED AND LOOKED forward to living the good life after 28 years as a federal sales rep for a communications company based in California. But as the economy slowed and his 401(k) shrank, Jordan, who lives near Sacramento, began to get nervous.

After a five-month sabbatical, an opportunity for a high-level sales position at Northrop-Grumman opened up, and Jordan went back to the work force.

After only a year, however, he says he was back to Square One, as the entire division for which he worked closed. More than 700 people lost their jobs that day, Jordan recalled, including him.

“I liked what I was doing, and it was such a shock to think, ‘Oh, well, I’m back in the job market again,’” Jordan said. “I didn’t want to make a career change — and there wasn’t ever a question of whether or not I wanted to get back into the job market. I had to do it because of my inability to continue to live comfortably on my retirement funds.”

## Making the pitch

Jordan’s first instinct, as with many job seekers, was to blanket the known universe with resumes and cover letters and hope that sheer quantity would sway the odds in his favor.

“If you looked through my e-mail, there are probably over a hundred different versions of my resume and cover letter that I modified slightly to align with various requirements of jobs I applied for,” he said.

Jordan signed up for “all the different job-search sites,” scanned local newspapers and magazines and networked furiously in attempts to land a position. One incident, however, offered him an astounding perspective and permanently changed the way he went about his job search.

“I’d applied for a job I found in the paper with a solar-energy products-manufacturing company, and I realized one day when

I was out that I was right around the corner from the address. I decided to stop by,” he said. It wasn’t a field in which he was interested or experienced, but it was a job, Jordan said. What he found was a nearly empty office space and a lone receptionist.

He explained his situation and asked if he could get some additional information about the job, the benefits and salary. The receptionist informed him that the company had received more than 300 applications for the position, and that only \$35,000 had been budgeted for the position.

“That was really sobering to me,” Jordan said. “A job that wasn’t that great, with lousy pay, and they had over 300 applications.”

But that experience was a blessing in disguise, he added. He realized that it made more sense to rein in his search and hone in on specific markets and companies with which he knew his skills and experience aligned.

“You’d think that it would make more sense to apply for anything at all you could possibly do, but in reality, if you don’t differentiate yourself in some way, one of those other people will get a job and you won’t,”

Jordan said.

## Deal or no deal?

As a sales representative with a career focused on the government market, Jordan says he’d been under pressure most of his working life to move to the East Coast. But he was adamant that he could do what he loved and stay where he was.

For more than a year, Jordan was employed at a number of companies in California. His first position was with a company that did work for the State of California itself, where he was assured he’d be only salesperson working with the state. When he started work, he realized they’d left out some crucial information.

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—Chuck Jordan

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# 12 Strategies for Job Market Re-Entry

By Deborah Dib

**A**RE YOU A TALENTED EXECUTIVE, frustrated with stagnation, ready for a change and primed to make a move?

If so, polish your brand, rework your resume, get back in touch with your network and get out there! This may be the best time in years to make your move.

Here are 12 strategies to accelerate your market re-entry:

1. Define and refine your executive brand so that your value proposition is strong, understandable and relevant to your targets.
2. Use a comprehensive approach to job searching. Don't rely solely on Internet job postings and executive recruiters.
3. Use your network! Build your network into a prime source of information and introductions to decision makers.
4. Familiarize yourself with the jargon of your target company and/or industry so you can insert those keywords into your resume and interviews.
5. Be proactive! Research possible companies, develop an employment proposal around key issues and use your network to manage introductions into the company.
6. Join professional associations and senior executive communities, where highly selective recruiters and companies often advertise positions, and where you can join both online and in-person networking groups.
7. Develop a team of advocates for your success — people who understand you, like you, respect you and will be happy to give you PR.
8. Consider using an executive talent agent if your transition is especially difficult, if you are severely time constrained or if your search is highly confidential.
9. Be sure that your resume and collateral reflect your brand and value proposition, prove absolute ROI and build a “fit” before you even interview.
10. Focus on building your interview skills and knowledge of your targets. Remember your resume is just a tool; it will not land you a job. Interviewing well by showing how you would perform in the new position will land you on the short list and help get the offer.
11. Build your online presence by posting your profile on sites like TheLadders.com, ZoomInfo, Ryze and Ecademy.
12. Create a Web portfolio or blog — you'll be differentiated, and you'll be in control of your online identity.

With a clear brand, viable targets, and a powerful ROI message, you will be primed to leverage the strengthening job market and rocket to the next level! ■

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Deb Dib, a pioneer in branded executive career management and founder of Metro NY's Executive Power Group, has nearly 20 years' experience accelerating executive careers.*

▶ SALESMAN

“It was a big culture shock,” said Jordan, who’d worked much of his career in business-casual environments or from a virtual home office. And, he said, he discovered that far from being the head salesperson at the firm, he’d been hired to handle overflow work from an existing employee. Needless to say, it wasn’t a fit.



Jordan

“I thought, ‘OK, I work in a cube, I have to wear a tie, and I’m a second-hand salesperson!’ I realized shortly that it just wasn’t gratifying,” he said. After moving to another position, he encountered similar issues.

“My next company hired me and rehired an employee who’d left the company some time earlier. He took over existing accounts in preferable sales territories, and I was given new accounts who’d never worked with the company before,” Jordan said.

To make matters worse, the company appeared on a federal non-approved vendor list because it had entered Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection a few years earlier, so most of Jordan’s efforts were futile.

“I had new territory with skeptical, hard-to-sell customers that weren’t allowed to buy from me,” he said.

**Closing the sale**

After 13 months, Jordan signed up for SalesLadder. Out of all the job-search engines he used, he said, TheLadders was the most effective, since it allowed him to fine-tune his search and weeded out positions and companies that didn’t fit his criteria.

“It did a lot of the qualifying and handled the elimination process for me,” he said. “What was taking me ten hours a day was made so much simpler.”

His refusal to give up or to give in paid off, when Jordan landed a position as senior account manager/consultant with Valencia, Calif.-based Nexus IS, which works on many federal government contracts. After only four days on the job, Jordan said he’s happy about the choices he made and feels he’ll be content and successful in his new role.

While his base salary isn’t as high as it was in previous jobs, Jordan’s not complaining. He said he understands that base pay rates have declined because of the economy, and adds that he has no salary cap in his new position, so his total earnings are up to him.

Jordan said the key to surviving and thriving was tenacity and a positive attitude, and he hopes other job seekers like himself will take his advice to heart.

“Once you realize that complaining and moaning aren’t going to help, you just have to stick with it and never give up,” Jordan said. “Once you get past that, fighting depression and suppressing the urge to just give up is the hardest part.” ■

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**Career Advice from TheLadders**

- Is It Your Age or Your Salary?
- How to Return to the Workforce at Any Age
- Around the Web: If Age is a Barrier
- How to Overcome Age-Based Excuses