

# Overcoming The 'You're Overqualified' Challenge



**Robin Ryan**Contributor

Another employer rejected me for being overqualified.

Nothing can be more frustrating than looking for a job and being told: “*you’re overqualified.*” Kathleen had been job hunting for the last year when she came for some career counseling. She was a 56-year-old director making over six-figures who worked for 10 years in a healthcare organization. She’d been promoted a few times but could not go any further in her company unless she relocated. She didn’t like her boss and she wanted to move on to a new company.

Kathleen explained, “My resume gets recruiters to call me but when I get in to meet the hiring team I’m getting rejected. I continually hear this complaint.

They aren't hiring me because I'm overqualified." She went on to say, "They are right. But the positions that I am truly qualified for are fairly high up, and there are very few of them. I'm frustrated and I just want out of my present situation."

So what should you do if you are credentialed with good experience and are looking to move, and you are even willing to take a lower level position?

Here are a few tips:

- **Don't be tempted to "dumb down!"** This strategy moves your career backward and often it can be committing career suicide. You typically end up frustrated, not hired, or worse, find a new job you can't wait to move out of. Most employers today want you working at your ability level since productivity is key. Many companies often have rules that you can't move up until you've been on the job for a certain amount of time. You may find that a higher level job does come available at the same company and you can't apply if you go in at a much lower level.
- **Do some soul searching and savvy preparation.** Acknowledge that employers are reluctant to hire a person who is overqualified because they think the person is unlikely to be happy, won't stay long, might want the interviewer's job, or expect a fast promotion and aren't seriously interested just in doing the job for which they are being hired. Nor do employers want someone who is burnt out and sees their job as an easy paycheck. Sometimes you can be threatening to the interviewer, especially if you are

truly suited for the interviewer's job. Examine why you want the position. "I need a job" is not a response that will endear you to them. You must use your communication skills to convince them why a demotion is a good option. You must create a reasonable explanation.

- **Don't show desperation.** You may feel it, but it will work against your getting hired if you show it. Too often a job candidate says, "I'll start at any job just to get my foot in the door." That won't work – it's an outdated strategy. Being willing to take *any job* often makes the interviewer disqualify you. They need a person to perform the specific job they are hiring for. You must show you can do it, but also that you *want to do* that job. You can offer some advantages, gained from your experience, such as: "My ability to solve problems and train others would be a major plus in the position". Many employers want someone who will excel in the job so showcasing your skills to solve their problems will be the more effective way to get them to hire you.

### **Here's Another Career Strategy To Try**

Underselling yourself is not the only option. You don't just have to accept that you must change careers and look for a new field, or settle for a lower level job and take a significant pay cut. Here are a couple other recommendations to consider:

- **Change your approach.** Look harder for positions that you are qualified for. Try using niche websites for your industry or association job listings. Customize every cover

letter you write (yes do write a cover letter!) and tweak your resume to match the opportunity. Be sure to address the major needs required and demonstrate the results you have achieved. Many candidates have poor resumes that do not effectively sell their skills. They lack results that show how you innovated, delivered cost savings and made the organization money. Demonstrate how you solve problems. Use your connections to learn any insider information about the opportunity so you can stress how your skills meet their exact needs.

- **Network ‘til you drop!** Many high-level positions begin with an introduction from someone you know or a connection that knew you. First be clear as to what you are requesting. Is it to pass on a resume? Is it to meet someone? Is it for company information? The more specific the request the more likely you’ll get the assistance you need. Network with former bosses, colleagues, friends, former employees, college alums, and LinkedIn connections. Referrals will lead to new people who can help you uncover unadvertised positions. An introduction can open new doors and even create a job when no advertised job was available. The Dept. of Labor stats reveal that 63% of all jobs last year were found through contacts so network! This process is lengthy and time-consuming but it does work.