

# Ageism in the Workplace

## The Reality No One Talks About Until It Happens to Them

For most of my career, I had heard people talk about ageism. It would come up quietly—over coffee, in side conversations, in stories about someone struggling to find a role after fifty. I heard it, and I understood it on an intellectual level, but if I'm being really honest, I didn't think it would apply to me. *Not me.*

It wasn't because I thought those women were wrong. It was because it hadn't been my experience. I had spent decades building a strong career—leading teams, driving results, growing businesses—and like a lot of women in leadership, I believed that if you showed up, worked hard, sacrificed, delivered impact, and built a reputation for excellence, the opportunities would always be there.

That's what I believed.

And then something happened that shook me in a way I wasn't prepared for.

For the first time in my career, I was part of a layoff.

### **When the Ground Shifts Beneath You**

The company I worked for made a strategic shift. On paper, it made sense—budget cuts, restructuring, a move away from a corporate-led model. But with that change came the elimination of an entire line of senior leadership roles.

I was a Vice President at the time.

And in a single moment, my role—along with several other experienced leaders—was gone.

There's no real way to prepare for that kind of shift. One day you're deeply embedded in the business, part of the strategy, part of the future, part of a *family* and the next day, you're not. And while there's the obvious financial uncertainty that comes with that, what surprised me more was the emotional impact.

It messes with your head more than you expect.

You start questioning things you never questioned before—why you, what you could have done differently, whether you were as valuable as you thought you were. After decades of building a career, I found myself feeling something I hadn't felt in a very long time... unwanted.

It felt less like a job change and more like a loss. Like a divorce from something that had been a huge part of my identity.

### **The Moment the Truth Hits**

But the bigger realization didn't come in the moment of the layoff. It came afterward, when I started looking for what was next.

That's when the quiet thing I had heard for years became impossible to ignore.

Finding a new role later in your career is different. And yes—it's harder than anyone really wants to admit.

Ageism is real, and it doesn't suddenly show up at sixty. It starts creeping in earlier than most people expect. The challenging part is that it's rarely obvious. No one says it out loud, but you start to feel it in patterns.

You send out applications and hear nothing back—not even a rejection, just silence. You're ghosted. You get pulled into interview processes that seem promising, and then they stall without explanation. You hear phrases like “you may be overqualified,” which is code for “you're too old” and usually, “you're too expensive”.

And over time, something shifts in how you see yourself.

The experience that used to feel like your greatest strength starts to feel like something you have to explain or justify. Not because it isn't valuable, but because of how it's being perceived on the other side of the table.

### **The Subtle Drift That Happens Over Time**

There's another layer to this that I don't think we talk about enough, and it's one I had to really look at in myself.

Over time, many women start to pull back a little. Not in a dramatic way, but gradually. You stop raising your hand as quickly, you stop pushing for the next challenge, you take fewer risks. After years of climbing, it can feel like you've earned the right to settle in a bit.

But what I've come to understand is that relevance isn't something you achieve once and keep forever. It requires ongoing energy, curiosity, and engagement.

If there's one thing I would say to every woman over fifty, it's this: don't fade into the background. Stay curious, stay engaged, keep learning, and keep showing up. The same energy that built your career is the thing that keeps it alive.

### **Rethinking the Job Search**

If you find yourself looking for a new role at this stage, the approach has to change.

The old model of submitting a resume and waiting simply doesn't work the same way anymore. You have to be much more intentional about how you position yourself and how you show up in the process.

Your resume can't read like a historical record of everything you've ever done. It needs to be a focused story about the impact you're making now. And there's also a reality here that no one really says out loud—you are often expected to make yourself appear *younger* on paper.

That means removing graduation dates, trimming early career roles, and tightening your story. Not because your experience isn't valuable, but because the system often filters you out before a human ever sees your name.

And here's something I've had to learn the hard way—I don't have just one resume anymore.

I have multiple versions.

One for demand generation.

One for revenue operations.

One for growth.

Because the truth is, if your resume doesn't match the language of the role—the exact keywords they're looking for—it may never even make it through the system. It's not enough to be qualified. You have to be positioned correctly for what that specific role is asking for.

That took me a minute to wrap my head around.

After years of building a career, the idea that I had to reshape my story depending on the role felt strange at first. But this is how the system works now, and if you don't adjust to it, you can get filtered out before you even get a chance.

And more than anything, you *have* to lean into your network.



After decades in the workforce, you know people—good people—who have seen you work, who understand your value, and who are in positions to open doors. And yet, so many women hesitate to reach out.

Don't.

Because at this stage, opportunities don't just come from job boards. They come from conversations, relationships, and people who already know what you bring.

### **Staying Relevant Matters**

When you're interviewing, it's not just about showing enthusiasm. It's about showing that you are still evolving.

That you understand what's happening in your industry, that you're paying attention to trends, and that you're continuing to learn and adapt.

And yes, that includes AI.

You don't have to become an expert, but you do need to understand how it's shaping your field and how you plan to stay part of that evolution. Being able to speak to that signals something important—that you're still engaged, still curious, and still very much in the game.

### **The Value We Bring**

There's an unspoken reality behind all of this, and it's one that we shouldn't ignore.

We cost more.

Those of us with decades of experience understand our value, and we're not willing to work for less than what we know we bring. But what often gets overlooked is everything that comes with that experience—judgment, perspective, resilience, leadership, and the ability to navigate complexity without panic.

Those things take years to build.

So instead of apologizing for the cost, we need to be clear about the value. We don't cost more by accident—we cost more because we bring something that cannot be replicated overnight.





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## A Message for Women Over Fifty

If you're in this stage of your career, this is what I want you to hold onto.

Don't disappear. Don't shrink. Don't quietly step to the side and assume your best work is behind you.

Stay curious. Stay visible. Stay engaged.

And if you find yourself unexpectedly starting over, know this—your experience still matters, your voice still matters, and your leadership still matters.

The path forward may look different than you expected. It may require a new strategy, a new mindset, and a different way of showing up.

But your story isn't over.

If anything, this is the beginning of a different chapter—and sometimes, the most powerful chapters come later in the story.

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Want to track my progress? I'll be documenting my changes on YouTube [@comebackover50](#), so like, share and subscribe to my channel.