

Improving Senior Female Inclusivity in the Workplace

A guide for female jobseekers and hiring managers in the PR, communications and marketing industry



WOMEN INPR

Women over 40 often bring powerful perspectives based on their professional and real-life experiences. Calm leadership and good judgement are critical to steering organisations through increasingly unpredictable and unprecedented times, while supporting the amazing teams managing their reputation. Yet, despite our undisputable value, too many brilliant female leaders struggle with impostor syndrome and lack of confidence, often exacerbated by a world that doesn't always vocally appreciate or support them, and that's before we factor in neurodiversity, disability, race, or social background. We're seeing increasing levels of burnout and talented women walking away. It's time to fight back.

The WIPR / Ellwood Atfield 'Navigating Ageism Guide' provides practical advice and tips that both employers and jobseekers can benefit from – and serves as a good reminder of everything we can achieve when we put our minds to it. If you're not sure where to start, or you're struggling to retain and attract senior female talent in your organisation, or are wondering where to go next, there is something in here for you.

We all need to be braver and bolder in promoting the skills and value senior women bring to the workplace, because they're unrivalled and essential.



Suzanne Edmond, Moxy Communications

Advice for female job-seekers in the 40+ age group

- ▶ A CV should not be longer than 2 pages and earlier roles can be packaged together to reduce bias. LinkedIn profiles should be kept updated with a clear explanation of what you do and what value you can add.
- ▶ Work with a qualified and accredited coach and/or recruitment professionals to help build confidence and to access advice about how to present your experience in the best possible light.
- ▶ If you require a flexible working pattern e.g. part-time, be honest about this from the first interview stage (and to the recruiter if relevant). To request flexibility at offer stage if you haven't already voiced it to the employer and/or recruiter might backfire. If you can, take advice from a recruitment professional about the best approach.

Networking & reconnecting

- ▶ Attend industry events and networking occasions—such as those hosted by Women in PR (WiPR)—to broaden your circle of contacts. Many opportunities arise through your network, not just job boards. Leverage your experience and existing relationships with senior industry professionals; let your network know you're seeking new roles so they can keep you in mind for potential opportunities.
- ▶ If you're not already active on LinkedIn, start now. Use it to reconnect with former colleagues and make new contacts. Engage regularly—comment, post, and connect—to stay visible in your network. Don't hesitate to reach out in person as well, whether for a coffee or a glass of wine, and let people know your current goals and how they might be able to help.

Raising Your Profile

- ▶ Have an opinion. Whether on LinkedIn, in trade media, or on your own social channels, raise your profile by contributing to current conversations shaping the industry. Share your perspective on pressing issues to demonstrate your relevance and expertise.

Sharpening employer accountability

- ▶ Hold your employer to account. If age is not already a recruitment consideration in your organisation, advocate for its inclusion. Push for age to be a measurable metric in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) strategies, even if it means having uncomfortable conversations—being the voice for change helps make the company better.

Applying for positions perceived to be more junior / a lower level than your experience:

- ▶ In the case of interim roles, to be over-qualified is a benefit – you should be able to 'hit the ground' running on day one, adding immediate impact with minimal support. You must emphasise to hiring managers that you seek to add value in this way and that you enjoy the nature of interim work (rather than expecting to take on a more senior role once you join the organisation).
- ▶ For permanent positions, you need to clearly demonstrate the added value you can provide, and to be clear about the reasons 'why' you are taking a step back – do you wish to balance a role with caring responsibilities etc?

Reducing the risk of stereotypical perceptions during recruitment processes:

- ▶ **Consider taking a course.**
Whether this is in AI integration in comms and PR or social media management and measurement or digital to build skills and knowledge e.g. Future Learn and the Government Skills Toolkit. If you can refer to this in an interview process it will help to counter potential assumptions about being less of a digital native than younger applicants.

- ▶ **Be clear about the benefits ONLY you bring BECAUSE of your experience.**
Are you comfortable / experienced with business change? These are valuable assets that come with time, resilience, and perspective. Do you cope well with ambiguity? How do you demonstrate dynamism? How do you stay plugged in to diverse news outlets and social media platforms etc. Map this ability to have your finger on the pulse with the benefit of your broad world-view, for example: If you've worked across sectors, understand cultural nuance because of campaigns you've produced, you know how to read a room and demonstrate empathy - these are all soft skills, but ones you've likely honed over your tenure, and not always things we think to voice.
- ▶ **Your experience is a powerful engine for idea generation.**
Years of navigating business change, ambiguity and shifting landscapes give you a sharp instinct for what works, what resonates and what risks to avoid. Demonstrate how you plug into media, trends and culture and as a result spot patterns & opportunities early. Your experience also means you bring creative thinking that's informed instead of reactive. That mix of strategic clarity and cultural fluency is what sets you apart.
- ▶ **If you're a professional who's navigated intersectional barriers, your perspective brings even greater depth.**
You're likely attuned to nuance, empathy and representation in a way that enriches messaging and strengthens campaigns to extend their reach. In addition to your idea generation chops, you can also identify blind spots, challenge assumptions and shape narratives that feel inclusive and authentic. These aren't just soft skills — they're strategic advantages in a world that demands relevance and responsibility. You elevate how campaigns land.

Explaining gaps in your CV

Once seen as a taboo in job interviews—a gap in employment—is now often recognised as a natural part of modern, non-linear career paths.

- ▶ Be honest and explain why you have taken time out of the workplace e.g. for childcare / caring purposes.
- ▶ Can you include relevant experience and skills that you may have gained e.g. volunteering, PTA activities, school governor responsibilities.

Return to work considerations

- ▶ Explore work returnship programmes that will actively encourage and educate organisations to hire female work returners.
- ▶ Consider interim / freelance positions as a means to re-enter the workplace.
- ▶ Consider job-sharing as a way of accessing senior roles while balancing other responsibilities. Two heads can be better than one!



Ways to support women 40+ in your business to progress

Watch your biases

Women 40+ still have ambitions. Don't assume they don't want to take on challenging or demanding projects. Ensure they're included in the high profile and critical campaigns.

Self-advocacy & confidence

Encourage women to actively promote their expertise and challenge outdated perceptions of age in PR.

Career mobility & planning

Provide strategies for navigating job transitions, salary negotiations, and avoiding career stagnation due to fear of ageism.

Building visibility & networks

Emphasise the importance of professional networking, mentorship, and thought leadership to remain influential in the industry.

Workplace rights & advocacy

Educate women on how to identify and address age discrimination, leveraging policies and legal protections.

Championing inclusion

Encourage senior women to advocate for workplace policies that support age and gender diversity, including flexible working and fair promotion practices.

Intersectionality & representation

Acknowledge that ageism intersects with other biases (e.g., race, disability, socioeconomic background). Support 40+ women by offering targeted development opportunities, sponsorship (not just mentorship), and visibility in leadership pipelines. Ensure representation efforts reflect the full diversity of age and identity.

Advice for Employers & Allies

Lead with the latest WIPR research insight that only 11% of those surveyed stated their organisations have age-related diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) targets and policies.

▶ **Age-inclusive hiring practices**

Promote recruitment strategies that value experience and remove age-related biases in job descriptions and hiring processes. This applies to inclusive language across all comms, avoid language that centres youth, neuro-typical phrasing and a consideration for intersectional professionals or industry hopefuls. Avoid: “overqualified” or “not a cultural fit”.

▶ **Retention & career progression**

Develop pathways for mid-career and senior women to continue advancing rather than being sidelined. Policies should recognise that ageism is compounded for under-represented groups so not just women over 40, but also neurodivergent women, and intersectional women. Share transparent promotion criteria and salary band reporting, to ensure women receive equal pay for undertaking the same work.

▶ **Mentorship & sponsorship**

Encourage leaders to mentor women over 40, ensuring they have advocates at senior levels. This should address findings (source: [Global Institute for Women's Leadership, KCL](#)) that highlight, in the two key areas to measure progression (wage growth and movement up a vertical occupational scale) the gap widens from the late 20s and early 30s as women's progression plateaus. Other practical considerations:

- Amplify contributions in meetings (e.g., "Jasmin's idea aligns with our strategy").
- Recommend women for promotions and leadership roles, countering age-related bias.
- Address pay gaps by auditing salaries and advocating for adjustments

- ▶ **Embedding age in DE&I strategies**
Integrate age as a core consideration in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, with measurable targets and data reporting.
- ▶ **Challenging workplace stereotypes**
Address cultural biases that associate innovation with youth and position experience as a key industry asset.
- ▶ **Flexible & inclusive work policy gaps**
How are you supporting life transitions, or are you ignoring them?: Implement flexible working, caregiving support, and return-to-work programs that accommodate midlife career shifts. Specifically call out menopause, child loss, adoption, fertility treatment etc...
- ▶ **Male allyship & collective action**
Engage men in advocating for age equity, recognising their role in shaping inclusive workplace cultures.
- ▶ **Go beyond allyship**
Consider engaging a woman over 40 as a consultant within HR or recruitment. Having someone with lived experience in this demographic can provide valuable oversight and ensure age-inclusive practices are genuinely embedded.
- ▶ **Intersectionality in policy making**
Recognise that ageism affects different groups uniquely. Embed intersectional analysis into policy reviews and impact assessments. Develop inclusive policies that address overlapping inequalities—such as flexible work, midlife health support, and fair access to advancement—for those most likely to be overlooked.
- ▶ **Internal training**
Offer and include training on allyship, menopause awareness, gender inclusion etc as a KPI as part of promotion / progression criteria.



Contact

Ellwood Atfield

020 7340 6480

hello@ellwoodatfield.com

www.ellwoodatfield.com

Interested in Women in PR?

Get in touch

info@womeninpr.org.uk

or find out more at

www.womeninpr.org.uk