

I'm 60. My boss is a 20-something. It's awkward.

It's hard to take orders from a superior whose mom is actually younger than me.

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It might be funny to watch a 40-ish single mom try to pass as a 20-something to get her old publishing job back on the new TV series "Younger." Or the middle-aged protagonist of another show, "Happyish," try to hang onto his advertising job after a pair of callow Swedish boy geniuses take over his company.

But it's probably more amusing if you aren't 60-something and watching while downing your fourth glass of wine to help you recover from your very own aging-in-the-workplace daily reality show.

Like the "Happyish" guy, I'm in advertising, where many of my co-workers and even bosses are still within hailing distance of their college days. It's hard to get used to taking orders from a superior whose mom is actually younger than I am.

I'm one of the lucky ones. I'm working. But though my vision is going downhill, I see clearly enough to know that however much money I spend coloring my hair or time I devote to memorizing the right pronunciation of Beyoncé's name, my stock is inevitably going down in an industry that has always worshiped youth.

No matter where I've collected a paycheck in recent years, it has been hard to forget about my age. One employer held special meetings just for young staffers, to help them forge bonds with upper management. Neither management nor young, I thought, what about me?

I joined some colleagues going to a bar for a round of farewell drinks for a departing staffer. There was a guy checking IDs at the door. The others pulled out their wallets, and I started shoving aside my inhalants, moisturizers and concealers to get to mine. Then with a pang of self-consciousness and shame I suddenly realized that nobody would be wondering whether I was older than 21.

At a conference with a new client, someone proposed an icebreaker. "Let's go around the room and everyone say which TV character you most identified with growing up." I panicked, realizing that my youthful TV references were unlikely to be recognized by anyone in attendance. Would they have heard of Maynard G. Krebs from "The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis"? What about Annette on "The Mickey Mouse Club"? Miss Kitty from "Gunsmoke"?

When it was my turn, I blurted out the only thing I could think of: "Rhoda Morgenstern on 'The Mary Tyler Moore Show!'" I didn't mention that I was not "growing up" but nearly a college graduate at the time.

As in most fields, technology has changed everything in advertising, where I've worked for 30 years. Trying to beef up my digital cred, I went back to school to earn a master's degree in digital media communications from New York University in 2013. Even so, it hasn't been easy for a former English major like me to keep up. With a queasy mixture of frustration and fear, I find myself furiously Googling things like, "How do you remove the formatting from a spreadsheet?" or surreptitiously seeking help from one of the interns.

Give me a break, I want to plead. What if the tables were turned, like in the movie “Freaky Friday”? I’d love to see you millennials try to hit 60 words per minute on the ancient manual typewriter I was given to use in my first job.

My industry appears to be swimming against the tide of the “Silver Tsunami,” as the American workforce ages along with the boomer generation. By 2020, it’s expected that 25 percent of U.S. workers will be older than 55. Some occupations already have a high proportion of older workers — for example, funeral directors, motor vehicle operators and tool-and-die makers. Not advertising, where according to ad executive [Brent Bouchez](#), “the average age of an advertising agency creative person is 28.”

But this obsession with young talent may be short-sighted. As Bouchez notes, people older than 50 have double the discretionary spending power of any other age group. The average head of household is 52. The average new car buyer is 56. The average Mac user is 54. So marketers must appeal to older consumers and may soon regret banishing everyone who saw the Beatles sing “I Want to Hold Your Hand” live on the “Ed Sullivan Show.” In your 20s and 30s, it’s pretty hard to understand the mind-set, needs and tastes of those decades older.

As someone constitutionally inclined to honesty, I hate having to hide and pretend. But even career counselors devoted to assisting older applicants advise doing your best to look younger and not mentioning that you’re eligible for the senior discount at the movies.

You’re enjoined to be 100 percent truthful on your resume — oh, except do remember to omit any dates that might date you. Please be honest — but not about the unflattering fact that you have more than the currently acceptable 10 years of work experience. If you want to stay in the game, you pretty much have to stay in the closet. Being older is the last bastion of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Even the counselor at my local unemployment office told our workshop group to take the dates off our resumes — while standing in front of a poster that read, “Age Discrimination Is Against the Law.”

I figure that to survive in the industry, what I need even more than software skills is acting lessons. “Always cheerful, always confident” is the mantra an advertising friend advised me to abide by. Each weekday morning, after spending a few furtive moments plucking stray chin hairs, I put on a happy face and head to the office.

Still, I wish I had the guts to forget about dissembling and just own up to being the age I am, to “stand in my truth” as money guru Suze Orman would say, to stop feeling embarrassed when I’m on the phone with the doctor’s office and I worry that my office-mates might have overheard me give the receptionist my birth date.

But change is hard. Full disclosure: I just went through this manuscript and removed all the age-revealing double spaces after the periods.