



HOW OLD ARE YOU?

By Kathy Graham

Before you answer that question, do you know that you actually are 10 different ages, only one of which is your chronological age? According to Boston College’s Sloan Center on Aging at Work, you also have a:

- **Physical-Cognitive Age:** Like babies are supposed to start talking and walking at a year old and older people are supposed to lose their ability to concentrate and retain information. The facts are that many babies start speaking before or after a year old...and many adult cognitive and physical skills don’t even peak until a person reaches their 60s or 70s.
- **Socioemotional Age:** Human lives unfold in stages—newlyweds, college grad, empty nester, etc. Some adults shift from “time lived” to “time left,” which gives more meaning and purpose to every action they undertake, steering them to seek challenging work that gives them a personal sense of accomplishment.
- **Social Age:** Some people assess life and themselves by what others think, internalizing what others are saying about people of X age, yet other people have their own internal standards, determining their own age capabilities.
- **Career Age:** People used to have one career, but not necessarily anymore as now there are people age 50+ who say they are mid-career or early career because they’ve switched careers, sometimes even more than once.
- **Tenure Age:** Career age once was the same number as tenure age—now people hold an average of 12 jobs between ages 18 and 50...and that’s not including job changes after age 50—tenure is a smaller number now.
- **Normative Age:** Like social age, it’s internalizing (or not) what your culture/society says about people of X age.
- **Generational Age:** Baby Boomers, Millennials, whatever—no one seems to be able to even assign the same time frames, but many judge themselves (and others) by these proven not to have substance generational assumptions.
- **Relative Age:** Working with younger people can make some feel older whereas working with older people can make some feel really young, because age is relative to a person’s environment.
- **Life Events Age:** Like physical-cognitive age, there’s an age people are supposed to be married by, have children, make partner, etc.—life events that when they occur later or sooner can make a person feel older or younger.
- **Subjective Age:** The overall assessment each person makes about personal energy level, fitness, and acumen.

The next time someone asks you how old you are, think a minute: which of these 10 ages are really applicable to the person’s question? Your elevator speech and resume change according to whom you’re speaking with and the purpose of the conversation. Your answer to “how old are you?” should be equally thoughtful, reflecting the information that is most relevant...and, yes, each of these other nine ages you are has a year number and date. There is not a need to lie. There is a need to be thoughtful and provide the most relevant answer for the specific time and place and information exchange.

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