

## AGEING WORKFORCE and WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

### “View from the Ground”

#### No. 4: HR Managers – Roadblock to Recruitment of Older Workers

Who decides whether you are too old for a particular job? Often it is the Human Resources Manager - the recruitment ‘gate keeper’ of the organisation. You see a job advertised that looks promising. You know you have the skills, the qualifications, and the experience, and that you could make a significant contribution to the organisation. You prepare an application, address all of the selection criteria, attach a resume and ensure the application gets in on time. Then you wait, and wait, and wait some more, but do not hear anything. You wonder, what went wrong, what didn’t I do, what should I, or could I have done better in order to get to interview? Eventually, if you are lucky, you will get a ‘thanks, but no thanks’ letter. Usually no explanation as to why you didn’t get to interview. After this happens a few times you start to lose confidence, you don’t understand what is happening. You question your skills and abilities, you write, and rewrite applications, until one day, you actually get to interview. You do all of the pre-interview preparation, learn about the organisation, try and anticipate the interview questions; and you may even get a friend to help with a practice interview. You are ready, having done all of the things that an HR Manager would tell you are required to prepare for a job interview! You dress well, arrive on time, and are called into the interview room and the first question asked is why you want the job. You think that you have answered the question well, until it becomes clear from the following questions that the HR Manager/Selection Panel believes you are ‘over qualified’ for the job. Why would a person with *your* experience, and/or *your* qualifications, want *this* job? This is HR shorthand for ‘*we think you are too old for the job!*’

Too many HR Managers make judgements and assessment of potential staff based on reasons other than merit. Whilst age is not required to be stated on the job application, it will be clear from the work dates listed that you have been in the workforce for more than twenty years. This explains why you didn’t get to interview in the first place! If you are lucky enough to get to interview then once they see how old you are, the prejudices will come into play. Many HR Managers have preconceived ideas about age and capability, age and capacity, age and motivation, age and ability to learn, age and technology, age and physical fitness, and so the list goes on. They have also become quite adept at using language to ensure that the real reasons for your lack of success in the job stakes has nothing to do with your age! And, heaven help you if you are an older worker who has ever had a workplace injury or an older worker with ability needs (physical or mental), because once they become aware of these you do not stand a chance. It doesn’t matter if these issues have no bearing on your ability to meet the inherent requirements of the job.

It should not be up to HR Managers to make judgements about whether older workers are ‘over qualified’ for a position, nor should they try and second guess the motivation of someone older applying for a lower paid or less responsible position. Older workers may want less responsibility, may want less stress, may want a more balanced lifestyle, but still want to use their skills and abilities to make a significant contribution. What does age matter if you have the capability and capacity to do the job?

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