

CCH Australia Ltd

Age discrimination dilemma as companies seek to plug skills gaps

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Australian companies want to hire mature professionals to address the growing skills shortage but are being hampered by the very industry established to service their recruitment needs, according to new research by mature age recruiters Adage.

In a survey of nearly 1,000 mature professionals, more than half the respondents claimed they had experienced discriminatory practices at the hands of the recruitment industry, thwarting attempts to connect successfully with organisations.

This disconnect represents a dilemma for corporate Australia as it comes under increasing pressure to mitigate the economic risks to their business as more than 4.1 million Australians retire over the next decade and 85% of new labour force growth comes from the over 45s. The research, conducted by Adage.com.au, the online recruitment site of mature age consultancy SageCo Pty Ltd, also discovered that:

- 51% of mature job seekers (45 yrs+) were seeking full time, permanent employment
- 49% were seeking flexible options including contracting, consulting or project work
- 95% strongly agreed there was a need for specialist mature recruitment initiatives
- 86% of respondents were more likely to purchase products and services from organisations that employed mature workers.

Director Alison Monroe said they had also included a survey of senior decision makers, representing 220 Australian organisations.

“This ensured we were getting both sides of the story and were able to understand where business priorities and barriers lay”, she said.

The results revealed that 91% recognised creating age balance in their organisation would be integral to future success and sustainability and 67% were already developing strategies to attract mature workers to their company.

The findings represent a significant shift in attitude, according to Professor Louise Rolland, CEO of Business Work and Ageing at Swinburne University and SageCo advisory panellist. “It’s encouraging after years of talking about the subject that organisations are recognising that if they ignore age management they will face the loss of people, knowledge and experience as the baby boomers retire”, Professor Rolland said.

“Organisations who do nothing will find it increasingly difficult to secure the most skilled and appropriate workers as their competitors target their employment offer to attract and retain mature people.”

Ms Monroe agreed that the research confirmed anecdotal evidence collected by Adage since launching in May 2005.

“We are hearing both sides of the dilemma — mature workers willing to work and companies willing to hire them. But somehow there is a disconnection and neither party is satisfied with the end result”, she said.

Mature people face the traditional problem experienced by mature people trying to navigate a recruitment industry where the average age of a recruiter was 27.

“The latent age discrimination faced by mature workers is something the recruitment industry is starting to recognise and address, but there is a long way to go before we see the average

agency extending the same opportunities to baby boomers as are given to generations X and Y", Ms Monroe said.

She said that the risks to companies were enormous, and were not just related to economics and reputation.

"Companies can face significant legal risk too. Only this week the Anti-Discrimination Board reported increases in the past year of complaints relating to age discrimination. This should be a wake up call for companies and the recruitment industry", she said.

Source – CCH / Employment (www.cch.com.au)