**Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability**

# Submission No 104

**Name** Paul Di Michiel

**Submission made by**

[x]  Older Australian in work

[x]  Business/employer

[x]  Other Author - 'Fired to Hired, The Guide to Effective Job Search for the Over 40s'

# Submission regarding Older Australians

### **Your experience**

**Have you (or the person you are submitting on behalf of) experienced employment discrimination?**

[ ]  Yes

[x]  No

[ ]  Not sure

### **Barriers**

**Do you think older Australians/Australians with disability face barriers when they look for work or are in a job?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**If yes, or not sure, what do you think these barriers might be?**

Yes, but the barriers are either borne of those they create themselves via lack of confidence and an often false belief that organisations will want a 'younger person'. Very often this lack of confidence turns into cynicism, and others (companies, the government, Centrelink etc.) are to blame for their unemployed status. In fact, it's their attitude and lack of confidence/enthusiasm that often holds older workers back. In addition to this, many older workers are not savvy when it comes to modern job search techniques. The old days of buying a newspaper, circling a few jobs, making applications and then moving to a new job relatively easily are no more. The advent of technology in job search (SEEK, LinkedIn) has also presented challenges to the less technologically aware older worker...

More practically, there is prejudice and bias in the marketplace...It's fundamentally part of human nature and people tend to like people like themselves and to be surrounded by people either like themselves or of their choosing. So a younger manager may be reluctant to hire an older worker, not just because they are older, but because they may feel they could be undermined by someone with more experience or knowledge.

**Does employment discrimination have an impact on gaining and keeping employment for older Australians/Australians with disability?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Are there any practices, attitudes or laws which discourage or prevent equal participation in employment of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

While many organisations espouse equality and fair hiring, this may not always extend down to the hiring manager themselves, who often may not be questioned about his/her selection of an individual or why they did not consider certain candidates for a role. In this case, the mature worker may miss out, simply because the hiring manager does not want an older person working for them.

**What are the incentives and disincentives for older Australians/Australians with disability to work?**

**Incentives:**

- Stay active and productive

- Make a contribution

- Add the value of their knowledge, experience and wherewithal

- Stability and emotional maturity

- More practically, earn an income in order to provide for themselves and their families

**Disincentives:**

- Older workers attitude or belief that younger workers will be preferred to them...Which almost allows them to de-select themselves from consideration in job search. Erect their own barriers.

- Indirect or direct discrimination practiced by hiring managers in organisations.

### **Good practice**

**Are there examples of good practice and workplace policies in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us of examples of good practice in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work that you are aware of.**

Can't think of any specifically, but you know when you walk into a company and there's an eclectic mix of employees...Young and old, different nationalities etc. That's a strong message!

### **Solutions**

**What action should be taken to address employment discrimination against older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Ensure that anti-discrimination legislation is practiced and monitored down to hiring manager level in organisations. Any company can 'say' they hire on merit and regardless of things like age or gender, but how this practically operates at the coalface is often a very different matter (especially where a manager exerts their positional power such that they won't or can't be questioned about their hiring practices). I once worked in an IT organisation where the Marketing Director only ever hired young blonde females under 30...When questioned, he would vehemently deny any wrongdoing, saying the best person for the role was selected (which was rubbish of course).

**What should be done to enhance workforce participation of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Raise confidence of older workers and remove the 'hard done by' attitude. Very often older workers are not selected for jobs or given promotions because they are not the best fit for the role, but very often the 'age card' is used such that this becomes the reason for not being successful (or very often even discourages older workers from applying). Put the age thing to one side and do everything you can to present your best self professionally in terms of the skills and experience you have and what you have to offer potential employees. You won't get every job you apply for but neither will younger people. You do however need to be satisfied that you have done everything in your power to represent your best self during the selection process...What value do you offer and what problems can you solve?

**What outcomes or recommendations would you like to see from this National Inquiry?**

Greater accountability on organisations to ensure their hiring managers are not actively practicing either direct or indirect discrimination against individuals simply based on age.

To ensure that older Australians are in fact 'willing to work' and that they have the attitude to present themselves to employers in the best possible light and not to use the 'age card' and the associated cynicism to hold themselves back. Self-belief within a receptive environment to employ older workers is critical.

# Business or Employer Submission

### **About you**

**What is your role within your organisation?**

Owner

**Is employment discrimination a barrier for older Australians/Australians with disability who are willing to work?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**If yes, is employment discrimination a barrier (please tick all that are relevant):**

[x] While working in a job

[x] While looking for work

[x] While dealing with recruitment companies

**What is your experience of recruiting and/or employing older Australians/Australians with disability?**

I've not hired staff in my current job, but have hired and managed older staff previously. As long as people are able to get the job done, I'm not concerned about variables like age, race, gender etc. It's all about being the right fit for the job in terms of experience and knowledge. The other benefit of older workers is that they are more stable and often can act as mentors for younger staff.

### **Barriers**

**Do you think older Australians/Australians with disability face barriers when they look for work or are in a job in your business/industry?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

Of course. Comes back to individual biases held by those responsible for hiring and their own mindset.

**Does employment discrimination have an impact on older Australians/Australians with disability gaining and keeping employment in your business/industry?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Are there any practices, attitudes or laws which discourage or prevent equal participation in employment of older Australians/Australians with disability in your business/industry?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

I work in the career coaching space and I've seen and worked with a broad array of people. In fact, it's one area where 'maturity' and life and business experience is an advantage!

**What are the incentives and disincentives for your business/industry to employ and retain older Australians/Australians with disability?**

**Incentives**

Experience, knowledge and wherewithal...Been there, done that.

**Disincentives**

None that I can think of.

### **Good practice**

**Are there examples of good practice and/or workplace policies for employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work in your business/industry?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us examples of good practice in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work in your business/industry that you are aware of.**

Put simply, hiring on merit. Best person based on the stated selection criteria gets the job.

**What works well in recruiting and/or retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in your business/industry?**

As above.

### **Solutions**

**What would help your business/industry employ and retain older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Greater encouragement to older workers to get out there and put their experience to good use for themselves and others.

**What action should be taken to address employment discrimination against older Australians/Australians with disability?**

We don't want to create a society that allows government to intervene too much in the running of businesses, but somehow we need companies to prove or showcase how well (or otherwise) they do in hiring and promoting older workers. More about recognition than punishment.

**What outcomes or recommendations would you like to see from this National Inquiry?**

Simply that older workers are truly willing to work, both in terms of their mindset (don't think about age as a barrier) and how they are received by organisations when they apply for jobs.

# Organisation Submission

### **About you**

**What is your role within your organisation?**

[x]  Owner

**What is your experience of providing work/services/advocacy for older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Nil in current role.

**What are the impacts of employment discrimination on older Australians/Australians with disability working or looking for work?**

Lack of confidence; Defeatist and cynical attitude.

### **Barriers**

**Do you think older Australians/Australians with disability face barriers when they work or are in a job?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

Similar dynamics to when applying for roles.

**Is employment discrimination a barrier (please tick all that are relevant):**

[x] While working in a job

[x] While looking for work

[x] While dealing with recruitment companies

**Are there any practices, attitudes or laws which discourage or prevent equal participation in employment of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure