

Myths of Older Workers

How do employers view older workers today?

Traditionally, employers have always had mental barriers in hiring of older workers. However this age discrimination amongst employers has escalated in the past months. Due to the economic crunch and retrenchment / freezing of hiring, employers have become much more choosy in selecting candidates and age has become one of the most important criteria in employee selection. The sad truth is, employees in this age group have the heaviest family commitments, and hence they are facing the toughest times in this crisis.

THE MYTHS:

- Older workers possess skills which are out-dated
- Older workers are absent too often because of illness
- Older workers cannot meet the physical demands of the job
- Older workers are less adaptable - they are hard to train because they cannot accept change
- Older workers command higher salaries

THE TRUTHS:

- Although they may lack new skills required in today's hi-tech working environment, and may take slightly longer to learn them, their attitude & willingness to learn is what employers should bank on.
- In fact, research in the US has shown that older workers have 40% less absenteeism than younger workers
- Job analysis indicates that less than 12% of jobs today require great strength or physical prowess.
- Adaptability depends on the individual. Even some young workers are set in their ways! In fact, most older workers have a more tolerant attitude to difficult working environment as they have learnt more in life and are likely to be unperturbed by chaos, politics & other distractions.
- Most older workers are willing to compromise on their salaries (much more than younger workers) as they are aware of the competition they face and because of their heavier family commitments.

Employers who have had success in placing older workers in the right jobs describe them as:

- Conscientious
- Reliable, dependable
- Thorough, careful
- Having higher attendance & punctuality than younger workers
- Having lower turnover than younger workers
- Having better judgement due to experience & maturity

Jobs that are suitable for older workers:

- Telephone operators
- Customer service
- Health service
- Temporary jobs
- Consultants (retired professionals)

Employers must realise that due to Singapore's ageing population, they may need older workers in the future. Often they fail to understand that every organisation needs a fair balance in age groups

as it contributes to wealth in ideas & experience. Older workers are skillful thinkers who possess valuable experiences and a work ethic that younger workers often lack. Employers should in fact change their mindset and think of them as 'mature' workers, not 'older workers'.