



JOHN HACKETT,
DIRECTOR, EVENT
RECRUITMENT

The elephant in the room

John Hackett discusses the value in employing older workers.

Bias against older workers endemic and ‘quite frightening’, according to Age Discrimination Commissioner Susan Ryan.

This is a headline that the ABC News website ran on September 17 with Susan Ryan making these comments following interim findings by Roy Morgan Research into employer attitudes to hiring older workers.

Susan went on to say that the reluctance of Australian employers to hire older workers is costing the country about \$10 billion each year, and that she was fearful bias against workers over 50 is much worse than previously thought.

So this led me to start thinking about my own experiences within the events industry, an industry typically seen as more suited to a younger demographic, and my dealings with client companies and their attitudes to older candidates.

I recall having the occasional employer tell me they will not consider an older candidate I have presented (who seemingly has the skills required for the role), because they won’t fit their team or company culture. I have also been told that my older candidate is over qualified for a role or that they will get bored over time even though that candidate has been fully briefed on the job. I have taken in a job brief and been told that the company culture can be best described as “young and funky” or words to that effect, or that the average age of their team is in the mid 20’s to mid 30’s range.

Now I am not one for conspiracy theories and all these client comments must be taken at face value as factual and considered responses, and they alone do not prove there is any discrimination going on out there. But in light of Susan Ryan’s comments it does provide some food for thought.

As such, I believe it is important to raise once again this notion of cultural fit; something I have discussed before. One of the key factors that determine the culture of an organisation is the individual personalities and experiences of your employees and

the resulting behaviours formed by them as a group. Therefore, culture is to a large extent made up of the sum of its parts and to my mind the best cultures, like the best societies, have diversity as a key component. So that can be diversity across an individual’s personality, experience, ambition, interests, heritage, marital status, gender, age, etc.

So returning to the broader employment market, Susan Ryan did raise a few suggestions that could assist the plight of older workers’ employment prospects.

She stated that as workers approach 50, they should get a “career check-up” to map out their career prospects over at least the next decade of their working life. They should ask whether they can continue to do their job - will they be able to; do they want to; and if they need to change what else can they do and how will they find another job? Susan added that training institutions could play a central role here, with support from governments, as they have good relationships with local employers and understand their markets.

She said that businesses too, need to undergo a “sea change” to see the value in employing older workers. She added that employers need to target the best person for the job, and not judge a person by the number of birthdays they have had (and I might add that more birthdays should mean more years of valuable and relevant work experience). Susan also questions the need for an influx of foreign workers on 457 working visas, when so many older Australians are still willing to work. She recognises that serious skills shortages do sometimes exist but finds it hard to believe this is across the board, when you look at the numbers of unemployed people in their 50s and 60s, the numbers of people who are willing to train and those who are willing to move for a job. **m**

Event Recruitment specialises in permanent, contract and temporary assignments for the corporate and government sectors, associations, conference, exhibition and event organisers and venues. Contact Event Recruitment on (02) 9279 2019 or email mail@eventrecruitment.com.au.