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Age Bias in the American Workplace

A "Fact of Life" Enters its Own Phased Retirement

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Table of Contents

Editor’s Note.....	3
Research Paper Summary	4
Introduction	4
Age Bias and Discrimination Defined	4
RetirementJobs.com Age Bias Survey	5
Major Categories of Age Bias	6
Failure to Acknowledge Application or Resume	6
Early Retirement Bias	6
Training, Development and Advancement.....	6
“Sorry, You’re Overqualified”	6
Older Workers Laid Off First	7
Recruiting Practices and Recruiter Demeanor	7
Organization Culture	7
Key Findings of <i>RetirementJobs.com</i> Age Bias Survey	8
Worker Opinion of Bias Near Unanimous.....	8
Company Size Not Significant	8
Workers and Candidates Not Optimistic.....	8
Bark Worse than Bite?	9
Employers More Positive	9
Job Seekers More Negative	10
Age 56 to 65 More Negative	10
Does the Age of the Boss and Recruiter Matter?	11
Happily Retired	11
Higher Paid and Management More Negative	11
Just What is Age Bias?	11
An Opportunity for Progressive Employers?	12
Opportunities for Attention and Action	13
Conclusion and Next Steps	15
About RetirementJobs.com	16
Age Friendly Employer Certification	16
The Author	17
End Notes and Citations.....	18

Editor's Note

Tim Driver, RetirementJobs.com Founder & CEO

In conducting this ongoing research, we've observed that workplace age bias is currently undergoing its own "phased retirement". More retirees and unemployed age 50+ workers are eager to secure employment. Employers, meanwhile, are increasingly understanding the merits of hiring or retaining older workers who relate well to customers, are dedicated, turn over less than younger employees, are often more productive, and hold valuable institutional knowledge and lessons learned through their career experience.

This is a welcome, and frankly overdue, change in attitude among employers. It is driven first by economic necessity – yet its by-product is important for our society and workforce. In an age where Americans live years longer, there is increasing anxiety about financial security and a desire to continue to contribute.

Employers however appear to have reason to believe that bias is declining in prevalence and intensity and are far more optimistic than workers age 50+. Why? This optimism among employers, we believe, is because they know something employees may not yet appreciate: that long-predicted worker shortages are arriving, and employers must begin to retain and hire more workers age 50+ to meet business needs.

With this Age Bias Survey, we are establishing the baseline for an ongoing **Age Bias Index** ©. The Age Bias Index, based on regular, periodic opinion surveys, will monitor and track employer and worker perceptions of age bias in the workplace. The survey tools underlying the Age Bias Index will evolve over time but will have a single-minded purpose – to measure and report on the scope and nature of workplace age bias.

The catalyst for creating the Age Bias Index was provided by Michael M. Smyer, Co-Director of the Center on Aging & Workplace Flexibility at Boston College. *"RetirementJobs is providing useful information on job seekers' perceptions of age bias in the workplace. It will be interesting to see if these perceptions change as labor force demands change."*¹

At RetirementJobs.com, we have a bird's eye view into this situation. We expect the "phased retirement" of age bias to accelerate, though its complete "retirement" or elimination across the workplace may still be a generation or more away. The state of age bias today is not unlike the issues of gender, racial and national origin bias over the past 30 years or more. The time to confront age bias has come. Please send your feedback to research@retirementjobs.com.

Research Paper Summary

This extensive research project performed by RetirementJobs.com suggests that *age bias is a blend of reality and belief*. The *reality* of age-based discriminatory policies and practices is undeniable. The magnitude of *actual* age discrimination appears greatly amplified by *belief* in the existence of age bias. Strongly held beliefs and preconceptions about age bias, essentially ubiquitous in the minds of age 50+ workers, have resulted in a *virtual reality* far beyond actual instances of age discrimination. This research provide insight into the scope and nature of age bias as it exist today – a necessary first step in overcoming obstacles for employers and workers and to enable the full utilization of the age 50+ and Baby Boomer workforce.

Introduction

RetirementJobs.com (www.retirementjobs.com), a company committed to matching job seekers age 50+ with employers eager to hire them, maintains an ongoing research initiative to monitor and gauge important labor market trends and employment practices. Central to our research is a recurring evaluation of the state and perception of age bias in the recruiting and employment of workers age 50+ referred to as the *Age Bias Survey*. It is our intent to monitor age bias in employment, both in reality and perception, on a regular basis to better understand evolving labor market dynamics in response to the rapidly growing 50+ workforce and changing employer practices. The RetirementJobs.com **Age Bias Index** ©, to be published on a regular basis, will be set against the baseline established by this initial study.

Our earlier white paper, “*Boomers to Bust Age Bias? – Baby Boomers Redefine Retirement*” (July 18, 2006), written in collaboration with John Sumser of *interbiznet*, focused on the emerging trend of age friendly employers, who of necessity or conscience, are beginning to target the recruitment and retention of age 50+ workers. The paper also reviewed the prevalence and persistence of age bias in recruiting and employment. This new Research Paper continues to pursue the nature and scope of age bias in employment and the rapidly emerging trend of employers to recognize the value and importance of the age 50+ worker.

Age Bias and Discrimination Defined

“Age bias” and “age discrimination” are terms in common use today but their histories are quite recent. Coined by Dr. Robert Butler (1969) in the Washington Post², “ageism” is “a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this for skin colour and gender.” Branine and Glover (1997) offered their definition of ageism as “a form of prejudice which abuses perceived chronological age in forming judgements about people, and age discrimination as acts based on such prejudice.”³

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA) established the legal definition of the topic and is the fundamental United States law intended to combat age-based discrimination. Essentially, ADEA prohibits the use of age as a factor in any employment decision or action including recruiting, selection, training, advancement, pay, benefits or termination. For our purposes then, ***bias is the predisposition to stereotype a group based on age, and discrimination is any action or decision predicated on such bias.***

While claims and settlement data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) indicate that age discrimination is an area of considerable activity, they do not provide conclusive evidence that *actual* age discrimination is growing or subsiding relative to the population of workers covered by the ADEA⁴. The number of claims is often believed to be substantially underreported - many workers covered by ADEA are unaware of their rights, charging discrimination is considered a provocative act, and litigation can be expensive, risky and emotionally stressful.

There is widespread consensus in the legal, enforcement and advocacy communities that age discrimination can be very difficult to prove and, therefore, litigate. Confidentiality agreements further limit information on claims settled without litigation. Until more thorough and rigorous research is done on the actual incidence of age discrimination in employment, RetirementJobs.com is focused on *perceptions of age bias*, as measured by our Age Bias Index®, and how such perceptions may influence behavior of employers, workers, retirees, job seekers and enforcement organizations.

RetirementJobs.com is committed to highlighting the policy and practice changes required of employers who wish to benefit from the rapidly expanding age 50+ U.S workforce. The comment of a current Survey participant summarizes the ambiguity and elusiveness of age bias. *“As an older candidate, you walk away wondering why you did not get hired – no interview, no feedback if you have an interview, and often not even an acknowledgement of your resume. You really don’t know what happened but in your heart you know why you were not hired.”*⁵ This theme of discouragement and resentment runs throughout the Age Bias survey responses and falls into several categories.

RetirementJobs.com Age Bias Survey

Our Survey methodology relies on voluntary responses to confidential questionnaires accessible through our website and through our periodic Newsletters.⁶ Participants are self-selecting and therefore do not constitute a representative or structured sample. The survey participants represent job seekers and employers visiting our website and publications to post positions, search for employment opportunities or review our resources and services.

The survey structure identifies participants' employment status, industry sector, employer size, approximate income, and profession or occupation. Several benchmark topics are explored including the presence of age bias as a "fact of life"; whether the prevalence of bias is changing; and personal experience with age bias situations. There were more than 600 usable responses to the Survey representing a comprehensive cross section of industries, income levels and ages.

Major Categories of Age Bias

There are several commonly held, and widespread beliefs about age bias in recruiting and employment of age 50+ workers. All were validated by the Age Bias Survey.

Failure to Acknowledge Application or Resume

Candidates interpret the absence of any employer acknowledgement as being related to their age or extensive experience. It is an understandable and predictable response in view of the widespread acceptance of the perceived reality of age bias (more than 94% of Age Bias Survey respondents believe age bias is a "fact of life.")⁷

Early Retirement Bias

Increasingly, employers and industries in financial distress (airlines, automobiles, metals processing to name several) turn to early retirement packages to induce workers to voluntarily terminate employment. While such packages can provide lucrative and enticing severance payments, premium pension payments and enhanced retiree healthcare benefits, they are by design intended to appeal to older and long service employees. Unfortunately, these early retirement packages carry an implied, or sometimes explicit, warning – the employer has a need to reduce staff and anyone not voluntarily accepting the terms and conditions could well find themselves laid off involuntarily with no special severance treatment. Positioning early retirement "packages" in this way makes them seem like a high stakes bet further provoking perceptions of age bias and discrimination.

Training, Development and Advancement

Many survey respondents report that employers systematically exclude them from receiving needed training and development to keep skills and knowledge current, instead focusing training on younger workers.

"Sorry, You're Overqualified"

Should age 50+ candidates succeed at being interviewed and backgrounds checked, but then ultimately rejected, the most common reason provided appears to be their "over-qualification" for the position. Employers appear to equate over-qualification with unreasonable pay expectations or with the potential for an extremely experienced candidate to disrupt the workplace equilibrium. Warranted or not, being declared "overqualified" has become a standard reason or excuse for rejecting older candidates.

Older Workers Laid Off First

The single most common form of alleged age discrimination is the reported pattern of terminating older workers and replacing them with younger workers. If this practice is actually as widespread as reported, one would expect a significant increase in age discrimination claims in light of 2002 court decisions declaring the simple presence of “disparate impact”, rather than deliberate discrimination, as sufficient grounds for legal action.

Recruiting Practices and Recruiter Demeanor

Many age 50+ job applicants attribute their failure to secure employment to the age bias of younger recruiters and interviewers. No doubt that some proportion of recruiters and interviewers may harbor preconceived notions, even bias, against older applicants, but it could also be that older candidates are not comfortable or skilled at projecting their strengths and confidence. The interviewing weaknesses of older candidates are often the same ones that will cause a younger candidate to be rejected.

Regrettably, a large portion of age 50+ candidate perceptions of age bias may be an outcome of contemporary recruiting practices. On-line job applications, electronic job posting boards, computer-based key word screening, and often overwhelming volumes of applicants, has resulted in a depersonalization of the recruiting process. From the perspective of age 50+ candidates, many of whom may have little exposure to the “new world” of seeking a job, the absence of acknowledgement, recognition and feedback is likely to convey a sense of exclusion when in fact, it is simply how *all* candidates are handled.⁸ What may feel like age bias or lack of consideration is nothing more than the result of today’s candidate sourcing and screening processes.

There is evidence though that age bias is more than a lingering myth or preconception. A July, 2005 job application experiment found that candidates over 50 had to submit more applications to receive an interview. Specifically, candidates under age 50 were 40% more likely to be called for an interview than those older than 50.⁹ Age discrimination claims tracked by the U.S. EEOC are growing at a faster rate than any other category of discrimination complaint¹⁰ though so too is the population of older workers protected by ADEA laws.

Organization Culture

Further reinforcing the potential consequences of age bias, a 2006 study conducted by the Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility at Boston College gathered information from over 500 employers and found that employers do have some negative attitudes about older workers in general.¹¹ For example, approximately 1 of every 5 the employers who responded to this survey felt it was “very true” that their late career employees are resistant to change (compared to approximately 1 of every ten saying this was “very true” for their mid career employees or for early career employees).

Key Findings of RetirementJobs.com Age Bias Survey

Worker Opinion of Bias Near Unanimous

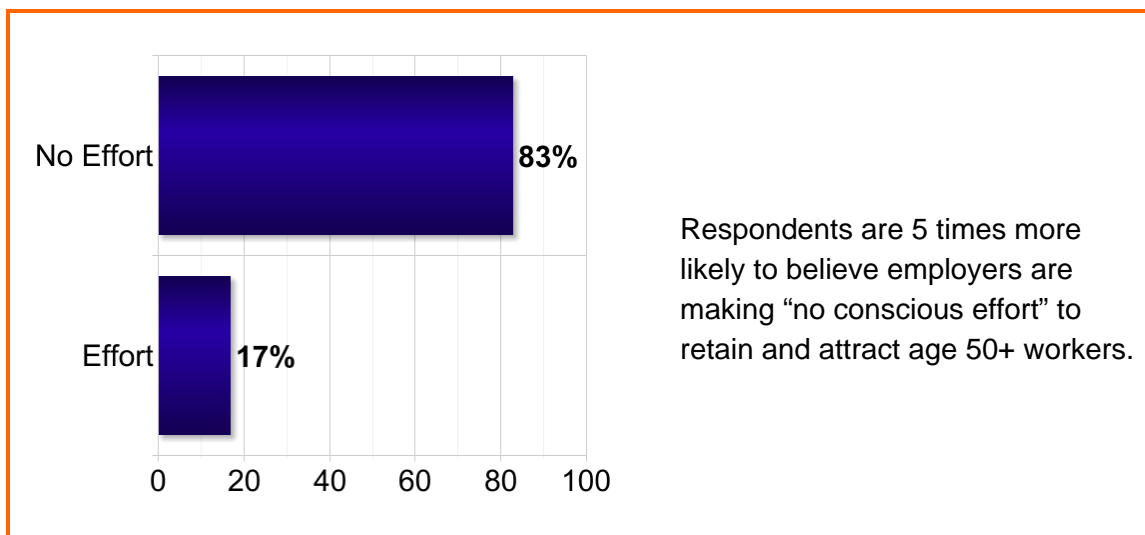
Overall, more than 94% of age 50+ workers (currently employed, job seekers and retirees) believe age bias is a “fact of life” in the workplace. Excluding retirees not seeking employment, about 96% of workers believe age bias is a problem. Over 98% of workers and retirees, age 61 to 65, concur. The perception of age bias is not restricted to lower paid and mid-level employees. A disconcerting 97% of survey respondents reporting annual salaries of \$100,000 or more agree age bias is a problem. In a 2003 study by ExecuNet¹² of senior executives, 72% believed that age bias and discrimination had increased since 1998.

Company Size Not Significant

While other research of *employers* has reported that “small firms and very large firms were less enthusiastic”¹³ about older workers, this Age Bias Survey indicates only minimal differences in *worker* opinion based on company size. Only workers in companies of 20 to 100 people have a *somewhat more favorable opinion* with 89% reporting that age bias is a “fact of life.” By way of extremes, a surprising 100% of respondents in employers of 1,000 to 3,000 employees believe bias exists and 99% in employers of 20 or less concur. Working for a very small employer does not appear to offer safe haven from perceptions of age bias.

Workers and Candidates Not Optimistic

The majority of respondents are not optimistic about the elimination of age bias in the future. Respondents are almost five times more likely to believe their employer is making no conscious effort to retain and recruit workers age 50+. Fewer than 10% of respondents were able to identify specific policies or practices intended to recruit or retain age 50+ workers.



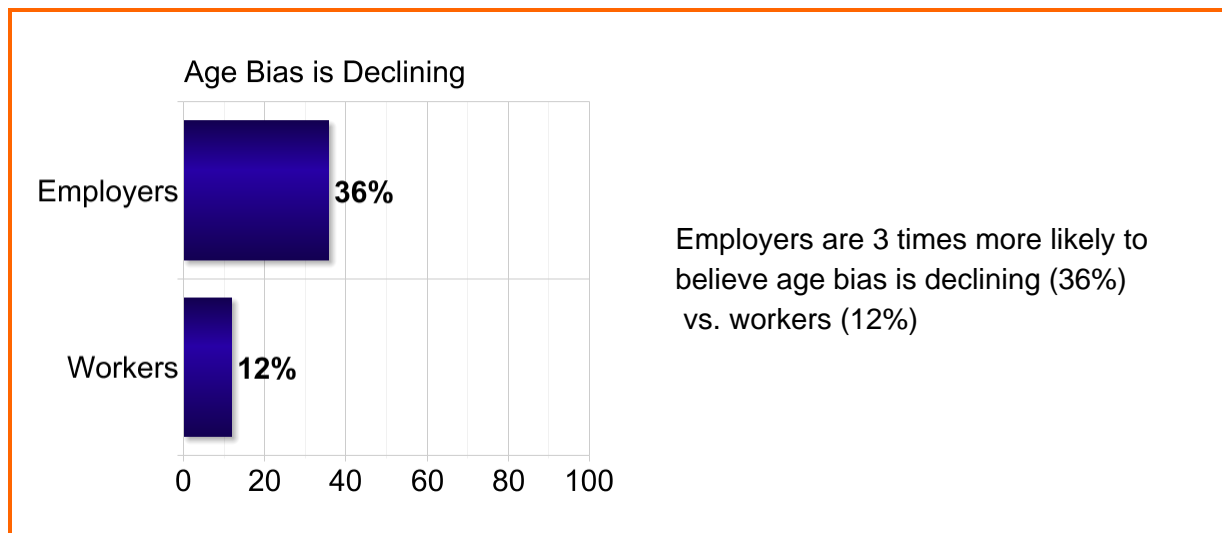
Employers face a formidable obstacle in overcoming such widespread and deeply entrenched pessimism and preconceived notions related to age bias.

Bark Worse than Bite?

While 96% of workers *believe* age bias to be a problem, a smaller number, 77%, of workers *“actually have experienced or observed”* workplace age bias. These findings are consistent with the 2002 and 2003 studies prepared by RoperASW for AARP that found the 67% had experienced or observed age bias and that 80% of job seekers believed they were facing age discrimination.¹⁴ In the absence of improved reporting, tracking and analysis, the *perception of age bias* appears to overwhelm employer and regulator opinions and efforts. “Since ageism has been woven into the culture of our society for many decades, older workers may indeed encounter ageist attitudes at the workplace.”¹⁵ For the present, it appears that the “bark” of age bias is so loud and threatening, it actually has the effect of feeling like the “bite” of verifiable age discrimination.

Employers More Positive

Respondents identifying themselves as an “employer” or “employer representative” have a predictably more favorable outlook on the prevalence and importance of age bias. Still, 78% report that age bias is a “fact of life.” Perhaps more significantly, employers are three times more likely (36%) to report that “age bias is declining” compared to only 12% of workers. Conversely, workers are three times more likely (54%) to believe bias is “getting worse” while only 18% of employers hold this opinion.



The more favorable employer opinion is consistent with public statements of major employer and industry groups who claim significant progress in improving employment opportunities for older workers and in combating age bias. The Age Bias Survey appears to contradict industry and employer objections to the reality of age discrimination with 58% of “employers” and “employer representative” reporting they have “observed or experienced” age bias in the workplace. Employer claims are also inconsistent with Society for Human Resource Management’s 2004 research indicating that only about 1/3 of U.S. employers actively recruit candidates age 50+.¹⁶

Job Seekers More Negative

Intuitively, one would expect job seekers age 50+, to hold more unfavorable opinions of age bias in employment. Almost 98% of job seekers, both “unemployed and seeking a job” and “retired and seeking a job” report that age bias is a “fact of life” compared to about 90% of employed workers. More than 66% of job seekers believe that age bias “is getting worse” compared to 54% of all workers. Perhaps because they are confronting the frustrations of difficult job searches, only 9% of job seekers believe that employers make a “conscious effort to recruit” older workers.

Having a job reduces unfavorable opinions of age bias – but not by a great deal. Many employed workers’ Surveys contained additional comments about “fear of the next layoff” or loss of retiree healthcare and pensions. One’s employment status appears to be the most important consideration affecting the level of perceived age bias.

Employment Status	Believe Bias is A Fact of Life
Unemployed, <i>seeking job</i>	98%
Retired, <i>seeking job</i>	96%
Employed, not manager	93%
Employed, manager / executive	92%
Retired, <i>not seeking job</i>	79%

Age 56 to 65 More Negative

While the difference of opinion about age bias between age cohort groups is relatively small, workers age 61 to 65 have the most unfavorable view of age bias followed closely by workers age 56 to 60. This outcome is consistent with the large numbers of “involuntary retirees” – workers who find themselves “retired” by virtue of early retirement “packages” or layoffs which

are widely believed to more heavily affect older workers. This is of particular concern as Baby Boomers continue to move into the cohort group most inclined to report age bias – individuals age 56 to 65.

Does the Age of the Boss and Recruiter Matter?

A supplemental research survey on age preferences of bosses and recruiters was performed by RetirementJobs.com to evaluate the significance of the age of the boss or recruiter on workers and candidates age 50+.¹⁷ The opinions expressed in the survey are surprising in their strength. While 98% of workers and candidates indicate they prefer bosses “older or similar in age” a puzzling 55% also said they were “indifferent to the age of the boss” while a mere 2% claim to prefer a younger boss. When asked to *specify the precise preferred age* of their boss, 38% said age 40 to 49 and 57% said age 50+. Age 50+ workers *may claim to be indifferent* but they most certainly prefer not to work for a boss younger than age 40.

When asked about their preferred age for a *recruiter*, 96% of respondents indicated recruiters be “older or similar in age” while 55% said they were “indifferent to the recruiter’s age.” A mere 4% claim to prefer a younger recruiter. When asked to *specify the precise preferred age* of the recruiter, 45% said age 40 to 49 and 44% said age 50+. Only 1% of age 50+ workers indicated a preference for recruiters age 20 to 29. Again, age 50+ workers *may claim to be indifferent* but they most certainly don’t prefer to interview with recruiters younger than age 40.

Happily Retired

It should come as no surprise that workers “retired and not seeking a job” have the least unfavorable opinion of age bias. Compared to 96% of all other workers who believe age bias is a “fact of life,” a still substantial 79% of retirees not seeking work agree. It appears that being free of the specter of age bias brings some relief. It should be remembered that current retirees are also apt to have more generous defined benefit pensions and post retirement healthcare than those following them.

Higher Paid and Management More Negative

A somewhat unexpected finding is that 98% of highly compensated (\$75,000+) and managerial workers believe age bias is a problem compared with 94% of those earning less and rank-and-file workers. Again, the differences between worker groups are statistically small but consistently unfavorable.

Just What is Age Bias?

The Survey responses and additional written comments provide a telling characterization of what age 50+ workers believe constitutes age bias and discrimination. Among more than 300 Age Bias Survey participants providing comments describing “age bias I have experienced or observed,” fewer than 10 individuals provide an apparent factual or substantial basis for their claim. Only two individuals reported successfully litigating age discrimination. There were numerous instances of individuals reporting they failed to pursue legal action because of the

cost, time and emotional stress. Similarly, there were three individuals reporting they had accepted severance packages in return for a release from all age discrimination claims.

This may simply reflect an indifference or reluctance to report personal specifics in a survey. The vast majority of respondents' written descriptions of bias refer to ambiguous or generalized situations such as "workers over 50 are always the first to be laid off", or "the recruiter always picked the younger, well-dressed applicant."

The vast majority of situations refer to *early retirement packages*, layoffs affecting those 50+, failure to receive a response to an application or resume submission, hearing nothing following an interview, being passed over for training or advancement, being interviewed by a "20 something" or losing out to a younger candidate. It is likely few of these complaints would rise to the level of discrimination under current law though they do speak to policies and practices that feed into age 50+ workers' expectations of age bias. There are other cases of blatant bias including job applications requiring chronic health care information and an age range.

This is the face of age bias for workers age 50+ today. Often described as subtle or "a sense" of bias, the comments of one participant summarize a representative view. *"As a former HR executive for 25 years, I am familiar with the unwritten rules about age that apply in many businesses. The bias against 50+ workers is that they are fixed in their ways, inflexible, not team players and cost too much. The reality is quite the opposite"*.

An Opportunity for Progressive Employers?

There is good news here! With only 17% of employers believed to be making "a conscious effort to attract workers 50 and over," there is a significant opportunity for alert employers to stand out in what will certainly become an increasingly tight labor market. The central challenge for any employer committed to becoming age friendly will be to earn the confidence of the age 50+ workforce through visible policies and practices reflecting willingness to confront and overcome age bias. According to Deborah Russell, Director of Workforce Issues with AARP, *"By examining company policies and practices, we are learning that employers are offering the kinds of workplace practices that are meeting the needs of this (age 50+) demographic"*.¹⁸

There are many clues as to the most effective way to approach age 50+ workers and candidates who often believe they are the target of age bias. More than 70% of boomers currently employed intend to work full or part time following traditional retirement (about age 62 or 63 today and rising). The age 50+ worker group is growing far faster than younger workers and will comprise 1 out of 3 workers by 2011.¹⁹ It will become increasingly important to understand and welcome this important workforce group.

The opportunity is especially important, even vital, in healthcare, retail, customer services, sales, financial services, the crafts and trades, engineering, skilled manufacturing, the sciences, education and in government service. These areas are already experiencing a shortage of workers while also facing large numbers of retirements in the next several years.

Opportunities for Attention and Action

The numerous studies and research about age bias and the age 50+ workforce may vary in details but all point to an inescapable conclusion – *there will be far more older workers, relatively fewer young workers, significant labor shortages, and greater focus on labor cost and productivity.* Age bias and discrimination, real or perceived, cannot continue to be an impediment to the full deployment of capable and committed age 50+ workers for the U.S. economy to maintain growth and vitality. The opportunities across the economy are substantial.

Advocacy Organizations

There is a vital role for worker and employer advocacy groups in overcoming age bias. The AARP, with over 38 million members is certainly the most formidable voice advocating for age 50+ workers and retirees. AARP sponsors three major initiatives specifically designed to encourage employers to attend to the attraction and retention of age 50+ workers.

The *AARP National Employer Team* is a program that connects individual jobseekers with mature worker-friendly employment. The *AARP Best Employers for Workers Over 50* is an award program that honors companies that have outstanding policies and practices for workers age 50+. Finally, the *Alliance for an Experienced Workforce* is a group of more than twenty major industry associations and membership organizations working in a collaborative effort to help employers understand, plan for, and create workplaces that successfully engage and utilize the skills of workers over the age of 50.

There are numerous other advocacy groups involved with the rights and interests of older Americans including the National Council on Aging, the Center for Workforce Preparation (a non-profit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce), the Operation ABLE Network, and the Senior Community Service Employment Program (administered by the U.S. Department of Labor) to name several. The New England Council's Older Worker Initiative, is a six-state effort, sponsored by the consulting firm of Mercer Human Resource Consulting that is exploring regional programs to advance the interests of older workers. There are numerous similar efforts throughout government and not-for profit groups. Collectively, these organizations can educate and promote a shared understanding of the attributes and value of age 50+ workers.

Research and Academia

Research and academic institutions are in an ideal position to provide objective and meaningful information about the merits of the age 50+ workforce and initiatives to overcome age bias. Notable organizations performing important work in this field include The Center on Aging and Work/Workplace Flexibility at Boston College, The Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, The Urban Institute, The American Enterprise Institute, The Brookings Institution, The University of Michigan, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, The National Bureau of Economic Research and Syracuse University to name only a few.

Collectively, these “thought leading” organizations are capable of playing a central role in defining, confronting and combating age bias and discrimination. The call to action for these organizations is to continue to collaborate and speak out to employers, workers, government and enforcement agencies.

Education and Training

Educational institutions and training organizations can play a formidable role in informing employers, workers, job seekers and the general public about the realities of the age 50+ workforce. The most immediate results could come from employers including age 50+ workforce issues in management and human resources training. The myths and preconception about age bias will more quickly succumb when people are well informed.

Employers

Individual employers and employer organizations and associations are the “prime movers” on the issue of age bias and discrimination. Whether motivated by enlightened management or competitive necessity, leading employers are tackling age bias head on. At the fore of this effort are the organizations in the AARP Best Employers for Workers Over 50, members of their AARP National Employer Team and employer and industry associations in the Alliance for an Experienced Workforce and major RetirementJobs.com’s clients include Macy’s, H&R Block, Robert Half International, The Home Depot, Mass General Hospital, Borders Group, The American Red Cross, Hyatt Hotels, Staples, and Deloitte & Touche.

Speaking to employees of the Society for Human Resource Management, Jonathan Segal, of the Philadelphia law firm, Wolf, Block, Schorr and Solis-Cohen stated “...preventing age bias could become the top diversity challenge that employers must confront over the next five to ten years.”²⁰ There is extensive information available on best practices for the attraction and retention of age 50+ workers. These leading organizations will set the pace for overcoming real and perceived age bias in the workplace.

The call to action for employers is to act aggressively in maintaining and expanding the age friendly workplace. The most important first steps for employers are to become better informed about the capabilities of the age 50+ workforce, examine their long term workforce plan and the significance of older workers, and to publicly declare their commitment to overcoming age bias as a necessary step to retaining and recruiting age 50+ workers.

RetirementJobs.com maintains an **Age Friendly Employer Certification Program** that evaluates the policies and practices of employers against a recognized array of the “best practices” of known age friendly employers. Participating in the Certification process is excellent preparation for employers considering greater engagement of the 50+ workforce.

Organized Labor

Labor unions play a vital role in the work and economic life of our society. Union officials and members can bring considerable influence to the examination of age bias. With nearly

13,000,000 members, unions can be powerful advocates for their members and all older workers. The leaders of major unions should consider placing a high priority on the issue of greater utilization of the age 50+ workforce.

Service Providers

There is a wide range of service providers involved with employers and workers. These include recruiters, consultants, attorneys, career coaches, resume writers and management trainers to name the most prominent. There is a significant business opportunity for service providers who understand the magnitude of the opportunity associated with the age 50+ workforce.

Some of the leading service providers that have embraced the business potential include Towers Perrin which produced a landmark study for AARP in 2005 “The Business Case for Workers Age 50+”²¹ which collects and evaluates a wealth of information on the costs and benefits of the age 50+ workforce. Other major consulting firms active in human capital and workforce planning are Hewitt Associates, Mercer Human Resource Consulting and Watson Wyatt Worldwide.

Workers and Job Seekers

With the most to gain (or lose), workers and job seekers must become educated about their rights under existing age discrimination legislation. Workers age 50+ must take responsibility for representing their best long term interests with employers. Job seekers have an obligation to maintain their skills, competencies and fitness for work. Job searches for individuals age 50+ can be horribly frustrating. The call to action for workers and job seekers is to learn about the resources, services and age friendly employers available to support their efforts to remain an active contributor in the workforce and to relentlessly pursue appropriate work.

Government and Enforcement Agencies

The U.S. EEOC and state-level enforcement agencies can provide an essential stimulus to employers to evaluate the state of age bias in their organization. State governments in particular have taken a leading role in age 50+ employment advocacy. One program worthy of note is *The Arizona Governor’s Advisory Council on Aging and the Mature Workforce Committee* that is actively promoting the 50+ workforce to the National Governors Association. The call to action for government organizations and enforcement agencies is to raise the priority on full utilization of the age 50+ workforce, strongly enhance enforcement efforts and become involved with education and legislative support.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Labor market demand, global competitive realities, the inexorable aging of the U.S. workforce and the desire of older workers to remain gainfully employed, compel our society to remove the barriers, real and perceived, regarding age bias. Collaboration of all interested parties is called for. Thomas Nelson, COO of AARP has stated, “*Government, private employers, the non-profit*

sector as well as individual citizens must play key roles. Governments worldwide must work to combat age discrimination in the workplace and provide incentives for employers to hire older workers. And, of course, people need to keep up with the latest technologies, be willing to learn new skills, and perform new functions.²² RetirementJobs.com renews its call for increased research, education and leadership to enable age 50+ workers to fully participate and contribute in the economic life of our society.

About RetirementJobs.com

RetirementJobs.com, Inc. was founded by a team of professionals with senior executive backgrounds in media, online recruiting and human capital management. They have worked at major media brands such as AOL, ABC, CNN and Wm. M. Mercer, built and managed strategic relationships with leading e-recruiters such as Monster, CareerBuilder and HotJobs, and helped found or build successes such as Net-Temps and Salary.com.

Along with a growing number of labor analysts, RetirementJobs.com's human resources experts observe that a long-predicted workforce change is now underway. The change, possibly the largest since women went to work en masse in the 1970's or the diversity initiative, is spurred by several factors. Among them: population shifts that have baby boomers turning age 60 amidst a dwindling supply of younger workers, health changes that have people living longer than ever, a new definition of retirement that includes a desire to stay active or a need to remain gainfully employed (see "[What is a Retirement Job?](#)"), and new research confirming what many may have known all along-- that, on top of experience, older workers bring valuable traits such as lower turnover, greater dependability, a stronger work ethic, and flexibility over work schedule and pay. More information can be found on the RetirementJobs.com website at <http://www.retirementjobs.com>.



Age Friendly Employer Certification

RetirementJobs.com's *Age Friendly Employer Certification Program* (Certification) is an rigorous process to identify employers that maintain policies, practices and programs consistent with employment of people age 50 and older based solely on their proficiency, qualifications and contribution, and on terms and conditions comparable to younger individuals. Further, *Certification* indicates an employer's recognition of the unique value of age 50+ workers as well as their commitment to take affirmative action in providing meaningful employment, development opportunities and competitive pay and benefits.

All employers posting jobs at RetirementJobs.com are asked to participate in the certification evaluation process. Those unable or unwilling to secure Certification will not be permitted to continue to post job openings. In this way, we can assure job seekers that they will be reviewing only *Age Friendly Certified Employer* openings at RetirementJobs.com. (see <http://www.retirementjobs.com/aboutus/resources/Certification.html>)

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End Notes and Citations

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