



Information Overload

Issue 21, May 2004

Welcome:

Welcome to this month's issue of Information Overload. Today we are going to be adding our voice to the debate on age discrimination. For those of you who have been following the news of late, this has become a contentious issue as Australia's Prime Minister John Howard reaches retirement age. Whilst we will not be asking if Mr Howard should retire and let someone else take over the running of the country, we will be looking at the very real problems facing our ageing population as well as issues surrounding our new generation of workers and the impact that redundancies has on everyone.

As always, if you would like to see us cover any other topics, we would love to hear from you. Just send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au. We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this edition to friends and colleagues.

We hope you enjoy reading, have a great week.

In this Issue we will be looking at:

- A Job for Life?
- It's Your Age!
- Getting a Foot onto the Corporate Ladder;
- When Reality Bites;
- An Ageing Profession;
- Succession Planning;
- Did You Know?
- A Thought to Ponder.

A Job for Life?

Having a "job for life" is really a thing of the past. Few people in today's work force would expect to stay in the same job for their entire working life as most of our parents did. Today's graduates expect to move on quickly from their first position, recognising that skills learned can be adapted quickly and easily to other things. (Please note I did not say "bigger and better" things – as this is sometimes not the case). According to Ken Anderson, CEO of Lee Hecht Harrison "graduates are likely to change employers

six to eight times over a typical work life" (*Human Resources, May 2003 p10*).

As you and I both know, whilst 6-8 employers may be the industry average, there will be some people whose CV reads like a copy of the yellow pages, who do not seem to be able to hold down a position for any length of time (HINT – if you are working on contract through an employment agency it is wise to say so on your CV). Then of course, there are people at the other end of the spectrum who are quite content to stay with the same employer for their entire working life in exchange for security and additional benefits – such as long service leave and of course the "Gold Watch". Yes, there are still some organisations who reward their employees with a gold watch after 25 years of continual service. As an example, a friend's husband left school at the age of 16 and went to work for a local brick making firm. He is still there some 26 years later, despite downsizing, restructuring and yes, Chris received his gold watch last year, along with a dozen colleagues who left school at the same time that he did.

The questions we will be looking at today include:

- How do you get your foot on the corporate ladder?

And keep it there, and;

- What happens when the firm you have just started to work for – decides to "downsize"?

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It's Your Age!

Respondents to an Australian Bureau of Statistics study conducted in July 2003 said the main reason they were unemployed was because they were considered to be either too old or too young for the job. Almost two-thirds (62%) of those who reported this were aged 45 years or older.

The main difficulty for young people was insufficient work experience. This problem was encountered by 19% of 15-19 year olds, and 22% of 20-24 year olds. (*Human Capital Australia Issue 2.3 "Workers become more selective" p5*).

Of course being considered to be too old or too young is not the only problem facing our workforce. Consider those people who are returning to the workforce after a prolonged absence, for instance taking time off work to have children and raise a family, sabbaticals and those who gave up work in order to study. Consider also those people who have gone through a re-training programme, updating skills in a bid to be more competitive in the job market, or unable to find work in the industry they have worked in for a number of years, finding themselves unemployed after being retrenched (or whatever else you want to call it). Not only do these people have limited current experience, but more often than not they also have age going against them.

Age discrimination is a major problem facing every industry, and likely to get worse – unless we change our thinking towards people who may be normally considered to be either too old or too young. At Information Enterprises we match skills and abilities of our registrants, with the needs and requirements of our clients and ask – can these people do the job that is being asked of them or not?

Getting a Foot onto the Corporate Ladder

In a presentation to the Archives and Records Educators Stakeholders (ARES) Forum in June 2003, Gail Murphy, IEA's Employment and Consulting Coordinator, highlighted the very real problems organisations face in finding experienced records personnel, and how employment agencies, employers and

educators need to work together to ensure there is a steady supply of qualified and experienced records management staff. Gail spoke about the need to look at the possibility of apprenticeships and traineeships as a way of promoting the industry to those people who cannot afford to give up work in order to gain the formal qualifications that more and more organisations are insisting their records management personnel should have.

Of course this problem is not just limited to the records management industry. It is a problem facing every industry. It is how we try and balance the needs of the organisation with the needs, skills and qualifications of those people who are ready, willing and able to do the work, but may not be able to work full-time!!

Gail presented some interesting alternatives to the problem. "In Australia, there are a number of programmes available including the *New Apprenticeships* incentive run by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training which combines practical work with structured training, to give young people a nationally recognised qualification and the experience they need to get the job they want."

"An alternative is a *Traineeship* in which work and learning is combined in a position. Similar to an apprenticeship, a traineeship includes a formal agreement between the employer and the trainee; a training program delivered by a Registered Training Organisation; and a nationally recognised qualification for the trainee on completion."

We must also look at the benefit of practicums as a way of gaining valuable experience in a working environment. Here at Information Enterprises we see a lot of new registrants who fail to impress the benefits they have gained during this important part of their study and learning curve. Similarly those people who donate their time in a voluntary capacity who have failed to translate the skills and experience gained into a message that makes a potential employer want to devote considerable time and resources to – first during an interview, and then onwards through on the job training and professional development.

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The problem with all of these various options we have outlined so far is availability. According to a survey conducted by Adecco - of 260 Australian employers questioned: 78% do not offer apprenticeships and 61% don't offer traineeships of any kind. However, the study also found that those people who are able to gain an apprenticeship or traineeship were more likely to gain senior management roles within the organisation.

- 90% were offered front-line management, operational and administrative roles; and
- 5% were offered middle and senior management roles.

Surely a case of – this actually works – shouldn't we do more?

When Reality Bites

According to a recent survey, 65% of employees aged 50-59 plan to work part-time in their retirement. (*Human Resources 21 April 2004, p22*). The question is will they be able to? Will employers be willing to allow workers who express a desire to work part time in retirement, do so? Or will they insist that the retiree give up their position for a full-time worker? And if they do - What will the true cost to an organisation be if this occurs? True knowledge management takes into consideration that information and knowledge held by individuals. As most down sizing seems to target those "older workers" or those people who have been with an organisation for a considerable length of time, consider how much corporate knowledge will be walking out of your door – and not coming back. Imagine if those people were to be snapped up by your "competitors" – how much of an advantage will they have over you?

An Ageing Profession

In the June 2003 edition of Incite, Phil Teece stated, "56% of librarians and 52% of library technicians are over 45 years of age. With one in 5 already past the minimum retirement age. What is slightly more worrying is the fact that there are less than a quarter of librarians under the age of 35.

Will today's graduates have the necessary skills to replace those who will retire in the not too distant future? Or do we need to look at additional options?

Succession Planning

If Apprenticeships and Traineeships are "few and far between" organisations who take the issue of succession planning seriously are almost non-existent. Succession planning is the pinnacle of retaining organisations knowledge, and is the ultimate in knowledge management. Take for instance those people who are "coming up for retirement" – How can you retain the knowledge of the worker who has been with the organisation for a number of years, whilst at the same time bringing in someone who could perhaps take on some of the roles and responsibilities whilst studying or doing some other form of on the job training.

This type of partnership has a number of benefits:

- Cross-pollination of current theory with real world experience - Mentoring should be a two way process.
- Facilitate the introduction of new graduates into the wider professional community, including work related and networking opportunities;
- Provides a forum for discussion of professional matters;
- Possibility of a reduction in working hours, or contract work for those people who would like to stay in the work force – but not "full time".

However, this type of opportunity is not for everyone, there will be some "mature" workers who may feel that by passing on the knowledge that they have gained is a way of outsourcing themselves out of a job. After all "Knowledge is Power".

As with all these options discussed today, this has to be handled as part of an organisations culture. Those organisations who seek to drain as much from its workers as it possibly can, before "retrenching/down sizing/ right sizing/ laying off or cutting back on its work force in a bid to retain competitive advantage over its competitors is probably not worthy of such a program.

Did You Know

That in America it is not illegal to discriminate against someone for being "too young". In fact the anti age discrimination laws do not

protect anyone under 40. The purpose of these laws, and the way they are written, are to protect workers from discrimination on the basis of being "too old."

Greenberg, David H and Pasternak, Jeremy, Age Discrimination in the Workplace.
<http://www.discriminationattorney.com/article-age.shtml>

Another interesting statistic for you. Did you know that there were 1.4 million new entrants into the Australian work force over the past 10 years, but there will only be

120,000 new entrants between 2020 and 2030. As a result, while there are currently six working Australians supporting each retired person, by 2025 this ratio will be one to three.

Business Council of Australia's report "Age can work" as reported on p4 Human Resources Magazine June 2003 "Business and Unions unite on ageing workforce front."

A Thought to Ponder:

"It is time I stepped aside for a less experienced and less able man."

Professor Scott Elledge on his retirement from Cornell

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email training@iea.com.au

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