



Information Overload

Issue 14, October 2003

Welcome:

Ageism, Sexism, Racism, Sizeism, Dress, Glass Ceilings, Religion, Skin Colour as well as language, accents, workers compensation claims, convictions, sexual preferences, illness and disabilities are all forms of discrimination that can and do still occur in workplaces across the world.

Discrimination can be described as “unfair treatment of a person, racial group, minority etc” and is any action that is based on prejudice. This can include actions such as harassment and bullying. Then there are the extremes of discrimination ranging from those people who bear the brunt of the endless rounds of “jokes” that permeate through workplaces, organisations and groups in general. Who hasn’t heard (or told) a “blonde” joke for instance? to those people at the other end of the scale who wage war on others, killing fellow human beings because of (amongst other things) religious beliefs.

We are aware that this subject is a huge one, and we don’t have the space to cover a lot of the issues in great depth in a single issue, therefore it is our intention to re-visit sections of this interesting subject in later editions. If you have any particular areas regarding discrimination that you would like to see us cover, please send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au. Or if you have suggestions for other subjects you would like to see covered, then please do not hesitate to contact us. As always we would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this newsletter onto friends, colleagues and other interested parties.

In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Interviews and Job Opportunities
- First Impressions Count
- Retirees and Returnees
- Glass Ceilings and Sticky Floors
- Equal Opportunities and Positive Discrimination
- Genetic Testing, Workers Compensation and Medical Issues
- A Thought to Ponder

Interviews and Job Opportunities

When putting a job application together in today’s competitive job market, most people make the decision to remove as much “personal” information from their application as possible. For example - Date of Birth, Marital Status, Number of Children, Religion, and so on – all items that used to be stated have all been stripped out. The reasoning behind this move is a simple one – applicants don’t want to be

discriminated against, and they feel that by adding “personal” information to an application, it makes it easier for a prospective employer to make decisions and judgements without the benefit of meeting them in person.

Of course, a lot of this information can be gleaned from other aspects of your application – length of service, place(s) of work, languages spoken and so on, however, an employer will have to read your application in some detail in order to determine both it, and its significance. At the end of the day, your CV/Resume has but one purpose – and that is to get you to the interview stage of the process. How you present yourself and your skills is then up to you.

First Impressions Count

We’ve all heard the premise that first impressions count, and that people really do

© IEA 2003. All rights reserved. You are free to use material from the Information Overload newsletter in whole or in part, as long as you include acknowledgement of source.

make up their minds within the first few seconds (let alone minutes) of meeting you. But how true is it?

Well, unfortunately, people do make assumptions about others based on what they see and observe.

Be honest, we've all done it, haven't we?

The question is - How accurate were your observations?

If I were honest I would have to say that sometimes I was spot on, and other times I was completely and hopelessly off the mark, but the fact that we can and do, make assumptions based on nothing more than a few spoken words, gestures and the physical appearance of another person is part and parcel of being human. In fact, people often remark that they wouldn't be human if they didn't do it.

Is this discrimination? – Well yes and no. It becomes discriminatory if you allow yourself to judge that person less favourably than someone who has “conformed” to the stereotypical “image” of what you expected to see. For example, if you are planning on recruiting the person “who looks the part” but doesn't have the skills required to do the job, rather than the person who may not “look the part” but has the necessary skills and qualifications required, then you are being discriminatory and may be prosecuted.

Retirees and Returnees

A recent news report from the United States (CCH News Archive 19 September 2003 – www.cch.com.au) says that the number of Americans aged 55 and over who are returning to work, jumped by over 28% (July 2003) from the previous year. The reason for the large number of returnees is a fall off in income due to a fall off in share market dividends and interest rate reductions instituted by the Federal Reserve to stimulate borrowing and investment. For example, a retiree with \$300,000 invested 3 years ago was receiving interest in the region of 5% per year, adding \$15,000 to retirement income. The same \$300,000 investment today may receive 1% interest, earning just \$3,000.

However, returnees are finding that they are being discriminated against because of their age. Whilst they have considerable experience, that experience is being ignored in favour of employees who do not cost as much to employ under the various award rates.

Glass Ceilings and Sticky Floors

A Census of Australian business has revealed that just four (4) of the top 200 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange had a woman CEO (October 2003). In addition 49% of Australian Companies did not have a woman at an executive management level. (CCH News Archive 1st October 2003 – www.cch.com.au).

And in a report issued by the Affirmative Action Agency (1996), Annual Report 1995-1996 p19 (p432 Australian Master Human Resources Guide) it indicated that women are disproportionately employed in occupations characterized by low pay, poor conditions and poor career prospects; There are barriers for women wishing to gain apprenticeships in a broad range of trades; and few women are able to advance their careers to managerial level.

Equal Opportunities and Positive Discrimination

Whilst legislation exists to ensure that all people, regardless of age, gender, racial and ethnic backgrounds and so on receive the same opportunities as their fellow job seekers, there have been occasions where certain groups of people are treated in a more positive manner than others, in order to obtain a better balance or mix of employee. However, there are still some professions, which seem to attract certain genders. For example, nurses are more likely to be female, accountants – male, secretaries and administrative positions – female, surgeons - male. Is this because of the stereotypical expectations we have, our upbringing or culture that we have as a society as a whole?

© IEA 2003. All rights reserved. You are free to use material from the Information Overload newsletter in whole or in part, as long as you include acknowledgement of source.

It is true that during the latter part of the 20th Century - we have seen a move by both sexes towards a job or career path that may not have been open to our parents and grand parents. Whilst we have still have a way to go to break some of the more ingrained stereotypes (readers of last month's issue – will recall the “librarian action figure” complete with twin set, pearls, sensible shoes and the “shushing action”) we do feel that opportunities will continue to be created for those people who want to push the boundaries.

One of the ways that some employment sectors have looked at the problem of inequality of numbers within their work force, is the use of Positive Discrimination. Whereby, the minority are given more “favourable” consideration than others who are as equally qualified or capable of undertaking the work.

But is Positive Discrimination the way to break down these barriers? Or should it simply be that the best person should be employed to do the work regardless of gender, age, race, height, weight etc?

One thing we do know – is that this argument will continue to be debated for some time to come.

Genetic Testing, Workers

Compensation and Medical Issues:

As research continues into genetic testing, there may come a time when employers will

be able to screen potential employees for a wide range of disorders and predispositions towards certain illnesses and diseases, and make a decision as to whether they will employ those people who “may” become ill at some point in the distant future. Whilst this sounds like the stuff of science fiction, the reality is that it may become part of a “normal medical” and sooner rather than later.

Pre-disposition towards certain illnesses also raises an interesting question as to whether an employer would be willing to employ a person if they had already claimed under workers compensation, especially if the work that the person would be expected to undertake was of a similar nature to that which caused the injury in the first place. In a similar way, would a prospective employer be willing to employ someone – who whilst they would be more than capable of undertaking the work, was likely to need time off work because of an pre-existing illness or disease?

Whilst equal opportunities legislation should ensure that everyone receives the same consideration for employment as the next person on the list, would a candidate be less likely to pass on this type of personal information to potential employees, if it meant that they were unlikely to gain employment because of it?

A Thought to Ponder:

“If you haven't got anything nice to say about anybody, come sit next to me.”
Alice Roosevelt Longworth (1884-1980)

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. Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to your colleagues' friends and associates. To subscribe they should send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au with “subscribe newsletter” in the subject line. If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter, please send an email to training@iea.com.au with “unsubscribe newsletter” in the subject line. If you have any suggestions as to what should be included in future editions, then please send an email to training@iea.com.au.

© IEA 2003. All rights reserved. You are free to use material from the Information Overload newsletter in whole or in part, as long as you include acknowledgement of source.