

Employment Discrimination

There is a growing school of thought that employers are showing a preference for recruiting younger employees. This is a subject that would be expected generate interest amongst researchers who are conducting studies of the workforce demographics. On a cursory glance, it would appear that the assumption appears to have merit. Whether the available evidence supports this is another thing.

On the ground, there is the human cry that young people are unable to get work. In sharp contrast, there is the view that older persons are being forced out of the workforce, to be replaced by younger persons. Whereas both of these positions can be disputed, there certainly cannot be dismissed as baseless. With the increasing numbers of young persons graduating from high and or secondary schools, colleges and universities on an annual basis, it naturally follows that the vast majority will find it difficult to find immediate employment. These young persons who come into the job market, often enter with the expectation of getting a specific job, or being recruited into a professional field for which they have been trained or hold the requisite qualifications.

While they wait to realize their dreams, most are unable to find some form of employment so as to attain some job experience. Those employers who place a premium of recruiting persons with job experience, immediately places the young job seeker at a distinct disadvantage. Some may advance the argument that this is a form of discrimination.

The justification for this position is found by reviewing the job advertisements that appear in the daily newspapers. Many ads state that only applicants with the relevant job experience need apply, and/or only those who suitably qualify will be acknowledged.

This argument of discrimination may be well founded, based on the premise that job experience could only be acquired provided that persons were hired before, or engaged under an apprenticeship and /or job attachment programme for a period of time.

Based on the evidence it would seem that the recruitment policy being engaged by some employers, places older and experienced members of the workplace community at a disadvantage. Some job advertisements now clearly state that applicants should

fall within a specific age group. Where the age group cuts off at age forty five, it becomes apparent that this raises a red flag as far as age discrimination is concerned.

In the instance of Barbados, some employers have taken to advertising for persons over forty five years and over. A case in point is to be found in the advertisements for the hiring of security guards by some companies. These companies stipulate that applicants fall between ages 45-65. Those able bodied persons who are far from being retirees, who may not have academic qualifications or a learnt skill, might have all rights to feel that they are being discriminated against.

Should the age factor becoming prevalent in the hiring practice, the presumption has to be made that this would not be encouraged as a norm, as it would certainly add to the problems both young and older persons are facing, as they go in search of employment opportunities.

This remains a subtle form of discrimination that deliberately goes unnoticed, as it is seen as part of the course. If the idea is to create a level playing field, then the selection of the applicant ought to be based on the basic factors of knowledge, qualification, skill and most important ability. There is a place for experience, but this should be applied as is warranted. With an aging workforce, it is questionable how age and experience could remain dominant factors in job recruitment process. If this practice was to be encouraged, the conclusion could be drawn that in going forward, there could be a potential crisis in the recruitment of labour.