

Features of Work Place Discrimination

(Published, 06 April, 2012, Barbados Today)

Discrimination in the workplace is always one thing that tends to divide employers and employees, and makes for the souring of workplace relationships. Discrimination in the workplace is not a gender issue, as both males and females are affected by it. Discrimination in the workplace takes place where an employer treats one employee less favourably than others. Put another way, it means treating some people differently from others.

Equality before the law is meant to remove the threat of discrimination in the workplace. Equality in the workplace means that every employee should have equal opportunity. This makes for a level playing field, whereby people are employed, paid, trained and promoted only because of their skills, abilities and how they do their job.

One common discriminatory practice found in many countries across the world, is the paying of a female employee less than her male colleague for doing the same job. This is a practiced that should not be condoned. It is expected that this behaviour is outlawed in countries that have signed on the International Labour Conventions #100 & 111, on the Prevention of Discrimination in Employment and Equal for the value of Work. Another common discriminatory practice is found in the recruitment process, where persons are discriminated against because of race and ethnicity. A minority employee may also be passed over for training and promotion opportunities.

The discriminatory practice is sometimes well masked in the recruitment process, where the employer undertakes to apply for a work permit for an employer; under the guise that there are no suitable available candidates. It is questionable if in most instances that this is not deliberate. It is fair to

say that there are specialist jobs both at the management and technical levels in any given enterprise. It is however puzzling why enterprises something are not proactive in their planning, so as to make provision for offering training to suitably qualified staff members; so that the organization can build its human resource capacity. It is factual to state, that in both big and small societies, minority ethnic employees are refused training opportunities offered to white colleagues.

The other disgusting side of the coin presents itself where an expatriate who is working or resident in a country, places and advertisement in the press for the hiring of a housekeeper or baby sitter. The question needs to be asked...What is wrong with the local person? Is this a case where race or ethnic origin has a place?

Inasmuch that it may be difficult to fully eradicate discrimination in the workplace, it befalls all employees to acquaint themselves with the fact that they shouldn't be discriminated against because of their, age, colour, gender, ethnic background, nationality, religious and political beliefs, marriage or civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity leave, sexual orientation, physical and mental disability. The point needs to be forcefully made that it is discriminatory and unlawful not to hire a prospective employee based on any of the aforementioned. In today's world, it is important to add to the list persons who are suffering from or affected by HIV and AIDS.

When reference is made to acts of discrimination in the workplace, there is the tendency to associate this with the employer and / or management. In most instances there are cries of victimization. This apart, workplace harassment and bullying also loom large. Employees should be aware that discrimination in the workplace does not only take place at the level of the employer, as their workplace colleagues can be guilty of imposing such behaviour on their counterparts.

In speaking to discrimination on the part of the employer, employees in the main should be ever vigilant in an effort to respond to any attempt to deny

them their employment rights. This practice is followed by employers who deliberately or otherwise, embark on exploiting workers. There are those employers who attempt to prevent, discourage or persuade employees from joining a union. Others resort to paying workers below the minimum wage, unlawfully deducting monies from their pay, not providing holiday with pay, and cheating them of a forty hour work week.

All of these acts are unlawful. As a matter of fact it is unlawful for an employer, regardless of size, to discriminate against an employee. This applies to all category of workers, whether full time, part time, casual, or contract employees, or as a probationary employees, apprentices and/ or trainees.