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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT  
AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

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RECEIVED

**Increasing Participation in the Workforce:**

I begin this submission, by clarifying my position in relation to this enquiry.

I am female, over 30 and currently employed fulltime.

Whilst I am employed fulltime, over the past two years I have been attempting to find alternative employment (ie: I am looking for another job with a different company). What I would have thought would have been a simple exercise has turned out to be an exercise in futility.

The main point that I wish to illustrate is that, if I am finding it difficult obtaining another job, the experience of those attempting to return to the workforce must be far greater.

With the proliferation of recruitment agencies now acting as screens for most companies, I have found difficult, if not impossible to obtain even an interview.

I commenced my search for an alternative job by sending out hundreds of letters with a copy of my resume directly to the human resource departments of any company I was interested in being employed by, only to find of those that did bother to reply, the stock standard, "Thanks but no thanks" letter in my mail box.

I read up on how to enhance my resume via online recruitment websites, and adjusted my resume according to the "target job" that I was searching for.

I have been applying for (on average) two to three jobs per week for two years now, that is a total of 312 job applications (not including unsolicited applications and cold calls) and to date I have been called for one interview.

In order to obtain some hard data, I kept a record of all the jobs that I have applied for between the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2003 and the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 2003. During that time I have applied for 37 jobs (via online recruiting agency websites) and have received return emails advising me that I was unsuccessful for 5 of those applications.

The quickest response time I had from a recruitment agency was two hours. That is two hours after I submitted an application I was advised that I was unsuccessful. I have to date, received no correspondence with regards to the other applications. This lead me to believe that

- (a) My application was not actually read by a human being, or
- (b) The job that was advertised did not actually exist.

The rejection letter that stands out most, advised me that if I would like to receive feedback on my interview performance, I should phone the job contact person.

Considering that I was not called for an interview for this particular application, I am wondering how they will be able to provide feedback for an interview I never had.

Contrast this experience with that of several younger friends of mine (ie: under 30) who seem to have no trouble finding and gaining employment. One in particular has changed jobs three times in the last two years and is constantly being called by recruitment agencies with job offers. Mind you, this is mainly for call centre type work.

This to me would indicate widespread age discrimination, although as we all know, this is illegal.

At one stage I was advised by a recruitment consultant that a particular job that I had applied for was "below my qualifications" and therefore that would indicate that I would get bored in the position and want to move on, which in turn would mean that the company would need to spend further time and money hiring someone for the job who would stay longer.

I do not believe that recruitment consultant was in a position to make these comments.

For those that are unemployed, and are willing to accept any employment, this attitude certainly does not help. It seems that applying for just any job is detrimental, because even though you may be willing and able to work, the recruitment agencies are not willing to even interview you, because they assume you are over qualified and will want to move on within a short period of time.

If that is not blatant discrimination, I do not know what is. For an unemployed person faced with this situation the legal remedies are out of reach due to lack of funds.

At other times I have been advised that I am not a candidate whose skills and experience are of the same calibre as those who are called for interviews. An interesting point to note is that many of these positions that I have applied for are in the same field, and doing the same job that I am currently doing. Funnily enough my current employer obviously thought I had enough skill and expertise during this time, because they have promoted me twice.

So after two years of trying to find another job I have come to the conclusion that;

- (a) I am under qualified for any position I have applied for.
- (b) I am over qualified for any position I apply for
- (c) I do not have enough experience for the position I have applied for
- (d) I am too experienced for the position I have applied for and will get bored too quickly and leave,
- (e) I am unemployable by anyone other than the company I currently work for,
- (f) Recruitment agencies either advertise jobs that do not exist or have already filled these jobs by the time they do advertise.

If I am experiencing these difficulties in trying to secure another job, what hope have those people returning to the workforce got, particularly if you are female and over 30?

That is not to say that it is only women experiencing problems of this nature.

My husband, who was made redundant two years ago has found himself in the same situation. Countless job applications met with countless rejection letters, and only one interview to date. Certainly a demoralising situation.

So demoralising that I have heard him mutter that he wont apply for a job because it will just result in another rejection letter, so why bother? At one stage my husband was receiving unemployment benefits from centrelink, but these benefits were cancelled whilst he was assisting the rural fire service during the bushfire period in NSW towards the end of 2002, because he was unable to attend a centrelink office to lodge his claim. Since then he has received no assistance from centrelink.

From all this, I have drawn the following conclusions;

Whilst I agree that there are people in the community who truly do not wish to work, there are many more who do want to work but are unable to gain employment for a variety of reasons (some of them outlined above).

I understand the need to crack down on welfare cheats, but those who honestly need assistance should not have to jump through hoops to gain that assistance. If one is to receive unemployment benefits, support and guidance is needed as well as information on "how to sell yourself" to a potential employer (or more importantly how to sell yourself to the recruiting agent in the first instance).

The nature of the recruitment process has changed over the last three years, with the majority of job vacancies advertised through online recruitment websites. Most companies are outsourcing the expense and time required to attract employee's to recruiting agencies, and whilst I admit that there is some benefit in this exercise, I strongly believe that many job applicants are unfairly discriminated against in the process.

To prove a point, in 2002, I submitted an application based purely on professionally gained qualifications and work experience to an Australian tertiary institution. I had hoped to enroll in a post graduate diploma course in Business Administration. I was offered a place in the Masters in Business Administration course.

If I can be accepted into an MBA course purely on the basis of my resume and a supporting cover letter, why can't I get past the front door of a recruiting agency?

It is from these experiences, and the shared experiences of others that I believe that providing a job seeker with only unemployment benefits, without providing them with the skills, counselling, and if necessary the training to obtain employment is a futile exercise.

- Advice and encouragement when seeking employment,
- Be provided with information on how best to "sell yourself" or get your foot in the door with a recruitment agency,
- Be provided with interview skills, including how to respond to those questions which are illegal in nature, but are still asked during interviews (ie: questions on whether you have children etc)
- Provide incentives for employers to hire employee's who have been out of the workforce for a period of time

Addendum: 17 August 2003.

When I commenced writing this submission, I took the step of advising my manager's at work that I was looking for alternate employment, and for employment in a different field. (I was looking to move from an administration role to a business/process analyst role.)

As the company I work for would prefer that employee's further their career within the company as opposed to externally, with the help of my direct manager and the national manager of my department we developed a career action plan.

I had seen a job advertised internally that I believed I had the skills and experience to apply for.

I was promptly dispatched to the relevant department for some "internal work experience". I spent a fair few hours on the phone interviewing employees in the company who already held similar positions.

I obtained job descriptions for the role from the human resources department, and revamped my resume utilising the key words and phrases from those job descriptions, relating them to my skills and experience.

My managers took the time to prepare me for the interview by running through several mock interviews, and provided advice and assistance with answering interview questions.

During this time an alternate suitable position came up that was not being advertised, and my manager recommended me for the position.

Having thoroughly researched this type of position (and the fact that I had already spent time in that department doing "work experience". I was prepared for the interview and subsequently was successful in gaining the position.

Strangely enough, since accepting that position (I have held this new position for four days) I have been contacted by three different recruitment agencies trying to headhunt me for external positions.

Without the help provided to me by my manager and other employee's within the company, I doubt I would have been successful.

A person who is currently unemployed does not have these resources available to them, or they may be available at a price, which can be a burden due to lack of funds.

I spent four weeks researching this role, interviewing other employee's, visiting other areas of the business, and being prepared for the interview.

Unfortunately, recipients of unemployment benefits do not have this option. They are required to submit a list of the positions they have applied for to Centrelink in order to continue to receive these benefits, and it appears to be quantity over quality of the applications, which are assessed.

This experience has prompted me to add the following suggestions to my submission.

- Assistance should be provided to job seekers with regards to career planning, (that includes an assessment of skills and the identification of a career path)

- The ability to obtain some sort of work experience in their chosen field, (even if it is unpaid for a short period)
- The ability to practice interview skills and techniques in mock interview situations, and
- Guidance and support.