

# Older & Wiser

DESIRE & DEMAND MANAGEMENT

**A SUBMISSION TO  
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND  
WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

“Inquiry into issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment”

4 January 2000

## BACKGROUND

Older & Wiser is a national desire and demand management consulting group.

We are a convergence of consultancies run by people 40+ specialising in every marketing communications discipline.

We know (from bitter experience) the attitudes leading to a preference for 'letting go' even the most talented of older people.

We are ideally positioned to create and implement an effective strategy to

1. change attitudes which currently prevent the re-employment of people 40+, and
2. encourage the retention of those still in employment.

As *National Business* magazine reported, and more recent research confirms, the advertising industry is one of the most "ageist" industries with only 5% to 10% of their employees over 40 years old.

(We chose to become consultants because we were **better** than the people who replaced us!)

As you will see from our exhibits, Older & Wiser

- (a) is highly talented and professionally qualified,
- (b) has already created an employment campaign targetting employers and influentials showing exceptional people 40+ who shatter stereotypical ideas about the capabilities of older staff and employees.

Our submission is a solution, not simply a discussion paper.

# SITUATION

We have examined and analysed the available submissions on gaining employment for older people.

Apart for the graphic descriptions of people to their unplanned and unexpected change in fortune, there is broad agreement on the following:

**1. *The size and extent of the problem***

Several submissions presented the nature and extent of the problem drawing from the government's own resources.

It is large, protracted and shows no sign of disappearing.

**2. *Discrimination was apparent despite the law***

That covert discrimination is rife should not come as any surprise. Professor Ensel's work in NSW is well known.

The extent is confirmed in the recent survey conducted by Drake Management Consulting in October 1999 of 500 senior executives.

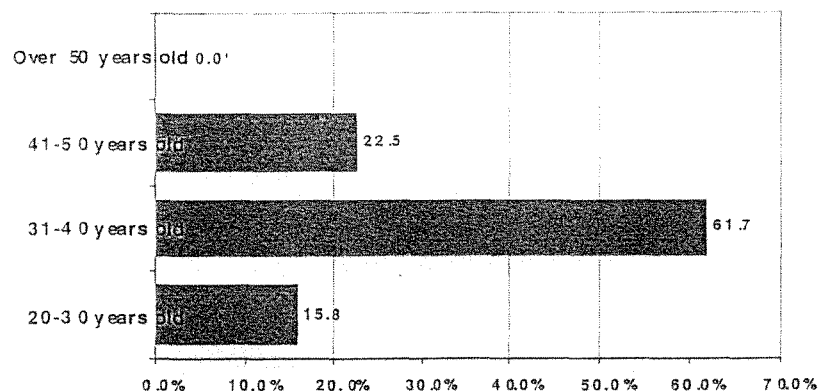


Chart 1: Preferred age group when recruiting and selecting employees

3. ***Labour market programs need to be better designed***

Several submissions recommended how to improve the match between older workers and the labour market programs on offer.

There was a suggestion that the current program designs are to some degree a reflection of the negative stereotypes of older people.

4. ***Attitudes and Ignorance of Employers are a major barrier***

All the submissions from professional "job matching" organisations took the opportunity to discuss, and comment on, the attitudes of employers to older workers.

*"Older people are seriously impacted by negative stereotypical views and employer prejudice and myths about employing older people and this perpetuates feelings of hopelessness and inability to convince employers of the value of employing older workers."*

Salvation Army Employment Plus, page 3

The comments were universally strongly critical of the ***negative and incorrect attitudes*** held by the vast majority of employers.

Organisations in this field recognise that well documented research worldwide has rebutted all of the negative stereotypical attitudes.

## OPTIONS

The Inquiry, it seems to us, has three major options available to it.

• Option 1      Recommend no change to current policy

The Inquiry could just leave it to the normal demographic processes so well described in the National Strategy for an Ageing Australia "Employment for Mature Age Workers Issues Paper, November 1999", page 4, produced by Bronwyn Bishop, Minister for Aged Care.

This document quotes an unpublished research report by Access Economics (*All In It Together*) which states that trends already in place will see the working age population grow by just 125,000 for the entire decade of the 2020's.

Currently the working age population grows by 170,000 per year.

Similar projections have been made by BIS Shrapnel.

Thus, the problem should start disappearing in fifteen years or so.

Not true.

The underlying major barrier to the creation of demand for older workers - employer attitudes - will have remained unchanged.

• Option 2                    Recommend evolutionary change

There are many small changes that can be made to the current set of government interventions in this sector of the labour market.

These are well documented by the various organisations operating on the supply side of the equation. As a selection of examples shows:

- The need for matching unemployed workers skills to the new market place demands;
- The need for better targeted assistance programs;
- The need to modify the current incentive packages.

**Again, although these changes will make the market more efficient, they do not tackle the major problem - the creation of employer demand.**

Older & Wiser suggest that the missing dynamic marketing issue - employer demand which depends upon a significant shift in awareness and attitudes - the stereotypical attitudes of potential employers must first be changed.

• Option 3                    Recommend a co-ordinated two stage marketing campaign (a) to change employer attitudes, (b) to support employers and workers appropriately on a consulting basis

The basis for this Option is well documented:

"There are some well established views on the need for government intervention in this area. The 1995 Commonwealth Government Senate Inquiry into Long Term Unemployment recommended that the education of employers be adopted as a strategy, to ensure the success of ameliorating mature age unemployment.

Recommendation 7 of the Inquiry's report suggested;

"That the government fund an advertising campaign to encourage employers and the wider community to see the very real and positive contributions made to the national output by workers aged 40 and over. In particular, the advertising campaign should aim at breaking down stereotypes of older workers as being rigid for change and for learning new skills.

"The South Australian Government is supportive of any campaign aiming to promote the value of mature age workers."

Submission 120: SA Minister for Education, Children's Services and Training, page 11.

"In the 1988 House of Representatives publication *Getting to Work*, recommendation 68 advocated: *"A community education campaign which challenges the assumptions held about middle-age workers should be developed through the CES"*. To be effective now though, one suspects that such a campaign would need to be developed and implemented with the fervour of an anti-smoking, skin-cancer or seat-belt wearing campaign.

"We believe there is sufficient merit for the (Federal) government to undertake an advertising or marketing campaign to promote the benefits to employers of either retaining their mature workers or recruiting from the ranks of the mature unemployed."

Submission 36 D.O.M.E. (SA), page 7.

Many other submissions acknowledge the breaking down of the false perceptions surrounding older workers is of major importance.

"NSA has adopted the following policies to address the issue of long term unemployment among older workers.

"In an attempt to dispel the myths surrounding mature age workers, introduce a national education and information campaign directed at Australian businesses, both large and small, detailing the benefits of employing people 50 years and over such as reduced absenteeism, fewer accidents at work, reduction in job turnover, loyalty, benefit of mentoring and the rapport with the ever-growing 50 plus market."

Submission 63 - National Seniors Association, page 7

It is a major first step to creating a climate which values the contribution older workers make to the national good.

**"Community Awareness Campaign**

"We believe that a high profile, proactive media campaign may assist in helping the community and employers better understand the issues impacting upon older workers and to try to dispel some of the popular myths that abound in relation to older people. A well developed marketing campaign similar to the TAC and WorkCover campaigns could promote the value in employing people over the age of 45 years and reinforce the message that we should value the skills and experience of people who have a contribution to make in the paid workforce."

Submission 73 - Salvation Army Employment Plus, page 7

The negative stereotypes will remain unless actively countered by a continuous stream of attitude-changing communications.

**"12. Combat stereotypes which falsely represent the capacity of older workers**

"Government should develop a strategy that will change social and industry by actively combating ageist stereotypes."

Submission 116 - JobsEast "Profiting from Maturity", page 8

**"4. Recommended Solutions**

"Marketing strategy directed at employers highlighting the benefits of employing mature aged workers and explaining traineeships and their relevance to this age group."

Submission 27 Jobfind Centres Australia

"COTA's main recommendations to the Commonwealth Government are that it:

1. Takes the lead in transforming employer and community attitudes to mature age people through education programs."

Submission 106 - Council On The Ageing, pages 4 & 25



Older & Wiser endorse this option and suggest the way is open for the Federal Government to take a leadership role in adopting an overall strategy and creating the Stage One process.



## SOLUTION

Older & Wiser has experience in the area of developing marketing campaigns in the labour market.

In Queensland, the long term downward trend in youth apprenticeships was dramatically reversed by a 12 week marketing campaign developed by one of our principals.

The Queensland Government is organising a "Whole of Government " approach to a campaign using our name "Older & Wiser".

Our approach was to organise for a co-venture approach where the money provided by government would be to maximise effectiveness through organised, complimentary industry and commercial sponsorships.

**As many of the private organisations are national in reach they prefer a national approach. *Only the Federal Government has the authority and stature to provide the essential leadership.***

The Older & Wiser Competitive Edge approach to changing employer attitudes is based on the need for them to recognise the many benefits to be gained through employing experienced, older staff and workers.

**There are, at least, 16,000 active, experienced, exceptional people who are currently lost to the national economy. And who are immediately re-employable to the benefit of the organisations concerned.**

Our estimate is based on the fact that, in any population, 10% will be exceptional. The national pool of actively work seekers is around 162,000 as at March 1999.

Attitudes can be changed, and placement facilitated, extremely cost effectively, through direct marketing to employers, human resource managers and staff providers.

To break the nexus, we can change attitudes through a two step process:

Step 1

Break down the attitude barriers to hiring older staff by marketing the employer benefits of exceptional people 40+:

- (a) Prove people 40+ can be a Competitive Edge resource by developing a powerful, research-based, package.
- (b) Generate demand for the 16,000 exceptional, experienced, productive people and put them before employers through direct marketing, industry media, other appropriate media, staff providers and an Older & Wiser website.
- (c) Demonstrate the importance of hiring "ability not age" through the development of employer-based case study testimonials about their new 40+ people.
- (d) These case studies will provide a continuing, managed stream of irrefutable facts for use in direct, local and national media.

Step 2

- (a) Devise and manage a parallel program of retraining and placement support needed to maintain standards amongst the remaining 134,000 mature age workers actively seeking employment. This can be done using existing Job Network providers. (We expect recommendations to the Inquiry already provided will greatly assist in this area.)
  
- (b) Continue to communicate the "ability not age" case for hiring people 40+ through industry and mass media, using the case studies emerging and the companies benefitting as proof of Competitive Edge advantages to employing mature age workers.

Changing attitudes takes less time, when "people like us" are involved in the communication process.

Reinforcement would need to be continuously supported.

Facts replacing stereotypical fantasies will need to be communicated continually through this stage of the marketing program.



# PROGRAM

## A. *Participants*

As we stated previously a national marketing campaign to change attitudes would involve:

1. *Federal Government leadership*

We envisage the Federal Government providing a forum for State and Territory Governments and selected commercial/not for profit organisations to discuss and agree the campaign concept.

The Federal Government may need to provide a modicum of seed money to kick start the process.

**(Our discussions with the Queensland and South Australian Governments suggest the concept will be very well received.)**

2. *All State and Territory Governments*

Any campaign will need to be adequately funded.

A whole-of-government approach may help obtain funding resources over time.

The benefits to various Federal and State portfolios need to be documented and presented to the Ministers involved.

By pooling these resources into a national initiative, significant economies of scale can be obtained, allowing greater impact.

3. *Co-venture sponsorship*

Assistance from non-government organisations can be obtained to (a) add credibility and, (b) improve the cost effectiveness of the campaign.

Older & Wiser have approached major organisations who have expressed an interest in participating in such a national program. These include a telecommunications company, a banking organisation, Australia Post, executive placement providers such as Morgan & Banks, the new Job Network and Employment Plus.

1. Telecommunications. For call centres so a single phone number can be used nationally, redirected electronically to the appropriate local area for action.
2. Banking. To provide a distribution network for publicity material.
3. Direct Marketing. To provide access for Competitive Edge kits and materials to be delivered.
4. Executive Placement. Particularly targetting the 16,000 exceptional people with areas of specialisation. Designed to encourage such organisations to again put forward people 40+.

5. The new Job Network. To handle the 134,000 people 40+ actively seeking employment who will need prior support to enable them to re-enter the workforce.
6. Employer Organisations. To add credibility and peer support to the Competitive Edge story. These national and state organisations have their own media and mailing lists. They will give "permission" to conservative employers waiting for others to show the way.

Older & Wiser is already equipped to support such a campaign simultaneously across Australia:

- (a) through our co-ordinated marketing concept and Competitive Edge "exceptional people" campaign; and
- (b) through our marketing strategy, two stage exceptional people program, specifically targetted employer and influentials media and our employment initiative Older & Wiser website links.

## **B. Operations**

The campaign will work as follows:

1. Direct and selected media to create awareness of the benefits of employing older workers. Advertisements in commercial and industry media and in national mass media will shatter the 40+ employee myths with facts emotively presented through "exceptional people" Competitive Edge stories, and a call to action offering more information, suggesting employers register their specific people needs.

It will target employers, major employer Human Resource Managers and CEOs, personnel executive placement consultants and their CEOs and Managers, and CEOs and others responsible for hiring in medium sized and small businesses nationally through existing and available direct marketing databases.

2. Advertisements would have a "call to action" seeking more information, or suggesting the employer call to register the need for a specific person to fill a vacancy.

Posters, application forms, etc will be available at a wide range of outlets.

3. Unemployed 40+ people in two stages:  
The Stage One 16,000 "exceptional people" 40+ already able to move



into responsible full or part-time positions and the 134,000 others actively seeking employment who may need training and other forms of support prior to or during the process of re-employment.

These people are already registered for re-employment and can be reached directly. They will also be encouraged through the mass media advertising to seek the help now being provided as well as directly by the agency at which they are registered.

The Older & Wiser website and Employment Initiative website will provide in addition a matching service for those who wish to find a direct link or other help in their process of re-employment.

4. Telephone enquiries will be directed to a Call Centre where caller details will be recorded.

Mail responses will go to a State-based Central Location.

5. All requests will be actioned:
  - Information requests will receive a Competitive Edge Resource kit;
  - Potential vacancies will be passed swiftly onto a placement agency.
6. All requests will be followed up by the sponsoring placement agencies with the exceptional 40+ people.

7. As people are placed, Older & Wiser is notified.

We contact employers to establish their interest in gaining access to reactions to their 40+ employee performance and permission to publicise their companies in future advertising.

## CONCLUSION

The problem of generating employment for people 40+ should not be consigned to the "too hard" basket.

What is needed is a program to tackle the major barrier - employer attitudes.

Just by changing attitudes the following will occur:

- unemployment will reduce;
- health costs will drop;
- age discrimination will start to be overcome.

All these are positive outcomes, generating wealth for the Nation.

Without attitude changes little progress is possible.

Our two-stage process is not expensive using as it does a co-venture approach.

It works because it puts the best people out front so they create a favourable impression for those who follow.