

## **RETRAINING THE OVER 45's – a brief overview**

The Grey Army, along with others, is endeavouring to educate both the general public and potential employers, as to the value of providing work for people over the age of forty-five. We feel it is important to reinforce the worth of the *over 45's* who have a lot to offer due to training and experience gained over years and the reliability factor synonymous with most people in this age group.

We should all continue to seek answers to redress the important issue of *mature-age unemployment*. We also must continue to educate employers and society as a whole to accept this worthwhile group of people.

I'm pleased to say that the Grey Army is having some success in this area, confirmed by the number of employers now ringing us to offer work to both men and women in the *over 45* age group; a service voluntarily provided to both employer and employee by the Grey Army.

Essentially each person who has found work through the Grey Army is now working in his or her own 'small business', either as a sole proprietor or with family involvement.

People shouldn't feel sorry for us; we're not over the hill and we have a great deal to offer!

The very success of the Grey Army since its inception two and a half years ago is proof positive. We have had an overwhelming response from members of the general public seeking our assistance in introducing them to qualified and reliable tradespeople in the *over 45* age bracket who could be trusted to enter their homes and carry out repairs, maintenance work etc.

There is, however, an urgency to achieve results in this area, not just to assist the *over 45's*, but to assist society in general.

If the head of the family, no longer in gainful employment, suffers from low self-esteem as a consequence and feels that he is left on the scrap heap ... then the whole family suffers and falls apart. His children refuse to listen to him, in fact his whole character changes, as it did in my case and this often leads marriages to break down.

We need answers fast and to achieve this we should look first of all to those areas of employment where society readily accepts the *over 45's* as being able to do a good job; an area where their expertise is already appreciated. We should then concentrate on training these people in these identified areas of current public acceptance.

There is a major shortage of qualified tradespeople in Australia and the Grey Army could, at any time, find work for an additional 500 tradespeople in the areas of tiling, painting, bricklaying and carpentry.

We've all heard complaints of tradespeople either not turning up for appointments or, when they do, 'charging an arm and a leg' for their services. There's also a proliferation of unqualified tradespeople doing sub-standard and overpriced work for unsuspecting householders and this is of definite concern.

In time of war, America had to re-train workers from making spaghetti tins to armoured tanks. They fast-tracked the training without compromising quality. If they had time limits on training (as we do) and had not based their training on competency alone, the war would have been over before one tank was run off the production line!

People *over 45* do not have the time to spend on long-term training. They cannot spend four years training to become a 'qualified' tiler – as required in some Australian States.

I propose a National Competency Test that would train the *over 45's* to a level of competency and professional standard to undertake work in the domestic arena up to a value of, say, \$5000.00. This would not include work of a structural nature and any licence fees etc would be paid to the State in which the work was undertaken. Some States currently do not require a licence so a National Competency Test would bring all States and Territories into line. National accreditation would also allow tradespeople to freely move interstate and still effectively operate their businesses.

Trainees would first have to undergo an adequacy test to ensure that they know which is the 'sharp side of the saw' and to prove that they have the basic skills to ensure they will be successful. It is important that this scheme is not limited to long-term unemployed, that it is for all mature-age unemployed people irrespective of their length of unemployment.

Basically, the only requirement would be that they had the desire, skills and abilities that, with further fast-tracked training would enable them to become qualified tradespeople, capable of building a career in their chosen trade.

Take the scenario of a person working in a bank who sees 'the writing on the wall'; the 'writing' that spells retrenchment in the not too distant future. Perhaps this person is sufficiently talented and has renovated the odd house or two over time and fancies himself (or herself as the case may be) as a carpenter. That person should not have to wait for 'the axe to fall', be a couple of years older and perhaps less employable, before he or she institutes a new career.

### **On-the-job Training:**

I would see a need for one person per discipline to work as a supervisor. This supervisor would go on-site to monitor work done by each tradesperson at least three times during the course of each job to check quality and give advice where needed. One qualified 'supervisor' would have the responsibility for, say, five trainees.

## **Administrative Training**

As every small business operator knows, to be competitive they not only have to offer qualified and fairly priced products or work but, and most importantly, customer service can often make the difference between one business's viability and the next.

This administrative training would be done in-house, out of normal working hours so as not to hinder the operation of each 'small business', and I see the need for an accredited trainer to provide courses addressing such things as:

- basic computer literacy and bookkeeping skills;
- information on access to government and semi-government authorities and their requirements;
- insurance requirements for small business operators;
- workplace safety;
- quotation skills;
- debt collection;
- PR skills incorporating good customer relations, telephone manner and presentation.

As I said, these people are in effect running their own small business and as potential future 'employers', they understand the needs and frustrations facing the *over 45's* – so there is no need to educate them on the value of employing others in this age group.

They would also be assisted – as the Grey Army currently assists some 2000 people under its umbrella – to promote their skills and abilities to the householder while maintaining a high standard of quality, reliability and service.

As an adjunct, the Grey Army also successfully established *Lawn and Garden Care Licences* throughout Australia. A number of our licence holders are currently earning in the vicinity of \$700 to \$800 each week – a definite improvement on unemployment! May I suggest you purchase the November issue of 'Money' which will tell you more about this program.

Selected applicants in the *over 45's* age group purchase a Grey Army trailer and any equipment and stationery items they need from us, at cost, and we train and assist them to establish a business, each servicing 80 regular customers with an allotted area of 3000 households. Intensive training is provided by the Grey Army as well as training in horticultural skills by the local authority. Later on some may wish to sell these businesses.

Grey Army policy is that all people under the Grey Army umbrella have the right to earn a decent living. They should provide quality work at a reasonable price, a benefit to the householder. A shortage of qualified tradespeople leads to an inflation in prices. Apart from reducing call-out times for household repairs, I believe that more trained tradespeople on the ground would encourage a fairer pricing structure.

## **SOCIAL –**

Because of the social cost due to low-self esteem and its resultant effects on families and society in general, it is important to look at the psychological aspects attaching to this group of people.

In my experience, many people start to lose direction and become just that, lost, when approaching 50 years of age.

I have developed a number of simple homilies that have been proven to greatly assist in giving people positive direction to change their lives from one of depression and despair to optimism and hope.

Many people come to me for advice and many also ring me to tell me later that, after talking with me, their lives have changed for the better. My advice is freely given.

Many *over 45's* reject counselling or even the need for it and certainly not in its current form or the venue in which it is available. They will only listen to someone who has been there, done that, and someone they respect.

Because of the time factor it is only possible to see a limited number of people. In order to overcome this I want to compile a book. It will be called *'I'm 45 – What's Next'*.

There will be 15 stories in the book commencing with mine, and the reason for the book and my homilies etc. The other stories will be selected from people from all different walks of life, what they did with their lives after age 45 and where they are now. They won't all be success stories but they will all be about people who have changed direction either by circumstance or choice. A typical story may be one of someone reaching financial success after age 45 or someone who has decided to completely change direction and pursue a career in art, poetry or music. People reading the book will identify with some of the stories and say, 'Hey, that sounds like me, that's what I am going to do'.

The book will be published with the Grey Army logo. I believe this book will be of great social value and hopefully a best seller.

**BRANDON CHALESWORTH**