

Christ and the Workplace

Ageism

Discrimination in the Workplace

Today's workplaces have external laws and internal taboos against discrimination. Unacceptable behaviors include racism and sexism; discriminating against ethnic and religious groups, gender-orientations, and pay for equal work.

Ageism: 50+

One workplace-discrimination that continues being practiced is Ageism. Once people are over 50, they are treated more as a liability and expense than an asset.

- If working, they are viewed as too expensive for employers (salaries, benefits, pensions).
- If not working, they are treated as unemployable because of their age.

Workplace discrimination against age 50+ is one manifestation of ageism. The heightened form is Age 65+ - the subject of this article.

Ageism: 65+

Today's dirty secret in the workplace is discrimination against age 65+ human beings. Baby Boomers face this discrimination, as they...we...either look ahead to 65 or back to it. Like all discrimination, anti-65+ is morally wrong and poor stewardship of human life and abilities.

Some Examples of Anti-65 Ageism

- Social stigma: *you're old. You look terrible* are two judgments we most often hear.
- Exclusion: *when are you going to retire?*, coming from the perception of 'being too old to be here,' when people gather in workplace or social settings.
- Judgment: *you took (3 or 4) sick-days from work! You should retire (ie., stop working...leave...forever).* But, no mention is made when one works 50+ hours per week, or takes work home, or take several days off vacation time.
- Economics: *age 65+ are expensive. Younger people will do the same or better work, at less cost.* That is an assumption, which needs to be tested with facts and examined in the context of Scripture..



Age 65+ People in Scripture

Scripture features high-functioning, chronologically enriched people:

- Moses was 80 when he led the slaves from Egypt (Exodus 7:7)
- Aaron was 83 when he helped Moses (Exodus 7:7)
- Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:5)
- Sarah was 'old' when she conceived Isaac (Genesis 18:11)
- Paul was 'an old man' (Philemon 8)
- King David ruled to a 'great age' (1 Chronicles 23:1)
- Joshua was about 80 (Joshua 24:29)
- Zachariah and Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist at 'great age' (Luke 1:7)
- Anna, prophetess, was of 'great age' (Luke 2:36)

God called each person to continue ministry. Age was never a factor in God's calls. Their experiences show us (i) age is not a limiting factor, (ii) their life and work experiences were an asset to everyone – including God!

Secular examples mirror those, which we find in Scripture.

Age 65+ People in Workplaces

Age need not limit people in workplaces:

- Peter Drucker, the 'godfather' of management, learned and made mistakes until he was 65. Then, he applied what he learned to what became his best works. The majority of his books were written post age 65. At 93, he decided to become an expert on Shakespeare.
- Nelson Mandella (government), Desmond Tutu (Church), and Warren Buffett (business) were never limited by age.

The Bottom Line

Discrimination against people is wrong. Intellectually and intuitively, we know it. But, ageism? Shhhh. That's a dirty little secret. Once you're 50+, you better watch out! You could be replaced by someone younger and cheaper. At 65+, your health is deteriorates; your memory and acumen, fade; and all the other nonsense which workplaces indulge in. If you're sick for a few days – you need to retire. If you work on days off or in part of your vacation, well...no comment.

God never discriminates against people

We mustn't, either. We are made in God's image, with divine presence and creative abilities always within us. That never stops. As for ageism, may it stop!

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