

B. CONSULTANT SURVEY: PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN HIRING THE OLDER WORKER

The study distinguishes between the older worker as an employee, on the one hand, and as an applicant, on the other hand.

1. The Older Worker As An Employee

The employed older worker is frequently preferred over the younger worker. However, union and company evaluations of older employees are tied closely to the kinds of work to be done; nearly all of the employer respondents, for example, expressed several different preferences rather than a blanket opinion for or against older workers. Broadly speaking, older employees are preferred for the more skilled or supervisory positions and for jobs that entail frequent contact with the public on important matters, e.g., those which are expensive, technical or personal in nature. Younger employees, on the other hand, are preferred for unskilled work, work that requires significant physical strength or stamina, and jobs that require frequent, but casual, contact with the public.

Employer and union respondents generally agreed in their evaluation of the older employee. This agreement and the absence of blanket opinions against older employees lead us to believe that most of the respondents show little, if any, conscious bias in their preference.

The nature of the preferences for older employees causes smaller companies to have relatively stronger preferences for older employees than larger companies. Because smaller companies employ fewer people to perform all necessary functions, they have greater need for the breadth of experience that older employees generally have to offer.

2. The Older Worker As An Applicant

There is a sharp contrast between preferences for older applicants and preferences for older employees. While older employees are preferred by employers for many types of work, the same employers are often reluctant to hire older persons for similar work. Underlying this apparent paradox are at least one or two general conditions, as well as twenty-odd specific objections to hiring older applicants, voiced by unions and companies. They are outlined below.

General Conditions Working Against the Older Applicant

Unfortunately, the positive qualities of older employees, namely stability, judgment, skill and experience and low absenteeism, are all adversely affected to some degree simply by virtue of an older employee becoming an older applicant. He is thrust into an unstable position and the value of his judgment, skill and experience and work record