

CHAPTER TWO
CONSULTANT SURVEY

It seems important and feasible to make certain general statements summarizing what our interviews* reveal about the role and problems of the older worker. These statements, offered below, discuss the older worker in two basic and very different roles: first, as an employee; and, second, as a job applicant.

A. THE OLDER WORKER AS AN EMPLOYEE

The employed older worker is preferred over the younger worker in many instances. Few employers, however, prefer to have either older or younger persons performing all, or nearly all, of the kinds of work necessary in a given company. Rather, preferences for the older or younger employee are closely related to the types of work to be done. In the skilled trades, for example, older employees are usually preferred. Employers believe that excellence in these trades continues to grow with experience and that the older experienced person is the most useful employee. On the other hand, younger females are generally preferred for unskilled clerical work. Such work usually requires no particular experience beyond a high school education. The younger female can do the work and she is preferred because she will accept the low beginning salary.

When contact with the public is important, as in the selling of expensive or highly technical products and personal items such as lingerie or cosmetics, the older worker is preferred for his knowledge, confidence, dependability, maturity and general handling of customers. Similarly, older workers are preferred for discussing loan applications or financial trust services and for servicing appliances. Where the contact with the public concerns such activities as selling products that are routine or impulse items or acting as a receptionist or bank teller, the older worker is at a disadvantage: younger employees are preferred.

For management positions, older workers are generally preferred because of their experience. Younger employees are generally preferred for such activities as unskilled production and material handling.

Where the younger worker is preferred, such preference seems to be based on the fact that experience and maturity are not essential to the work, and the amount of training required is normally small. Further, in certain activities the physical demands are greater than those in other types of work. Thus, the most positive qualities of the older employee, namely, his experience and skill,

*Hiring authorities of 36 firms and 15 unions.