

is unknown and even suspect in a new environment. Thus, the major strengths of the older worker are compromised by the fact that he is an applicant.

Perhaps related to this circumstance is an employer attitude which, though not strongly avowed, was expressed in many interviews. More than half of the companies surveyed indicated a vague feeling of uncertainty about the qualifications of older applicants. The nature of this suspicion tended to assume one of two forms. On the one hand, several respondents commented that "if they were better people, they would not be looking for work". Other respondents commented, with regard to openings for junior positions that "I probably would not hire the older person because a man should be doing better at 45 or above. If he isn't, he probably isn't a very good potential employee". The first of these sentiments is questionable since many older applicants seek work through no fault of their own. The second sentiment seems to voice the recognized fact that a person screening applicants can never be absolutely sure of his choice and must necessarily make intuitive judgments. Again, the condition of being an applicant tends to devalue the positive qualities which are associated with an older person already employed.

Overshadowing the general circumstances which make it difficult for many older applicants to exploit their inherent strengths are several specific reasons why employers frequently reject them. Fundamentally, these reasons reflect the fact that an employment decision is an economic judgment. The employer seeks that person whom he can most effectively utilize on the job, both at present and in the future. In this context, nearly all of these reasons seem to make sense, given the employers' particular situations.

The following pages present the various reasons given by companies and unions (generally in agreement) as to why older applicants are not hired.

1. Experience

Where experience is a prerequisite, it is one of the biggest advantages of the older applicant. Without this advantage, however, his value, compared to the younger applicant, is sharply reduced and often eliminated. The following examples were mentioned by several respondents.

a. Lack of Specific Experience in a Required Skill Seriously Hurts the Older Applicant

In the trades, for example, experience is of paramount importance to employers and the older employee is specifically preferred. Applicants, however, must be qualified in the appropriate skill. Unqualified older applicants cannot obtain jobs in these fields and, more importantly, they cannot become qualified.