



ATAP<sup>^</sup>

# Ageism and Hiring

Position Paper - 2019

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# Introduction

What does advocating for the Talent Acquisition profession mean? First, we want to elevate the profession and ensure that others who interact with us really understand the effect we have and that those considering Talent Acquisition as a career path see the fulfilment of this work. We also realize the importance of advocating for the profession. As The Association of Talent Acquisition Professionals (ATAP) continues to grow, we aim to provide insights and information to our members to help educate professionals on topics and issues that affect us and those topics that we can affect. Thus, the concept of “ATAP White Papers” was born.

ATAP’s mission is as follows: “We will build a common body of knowledge, establish standards and ethics, and advocate for our profession. We will cultivate a community to help professionals better learn from and network with each other.”

The list of issues that influence the work of Talent Acquisition is endless and, as a profession, we cannot always influence organizational policies or legislation as much as we would like. Therefore, it is important that we prioritize issues we can tackle at all levels - individually in the daily recruiting work we do, organizationally to influence our leaders and shape changes we believe will benefit all, and professionally to establish a platform for Advocacy work at the legislative level.

Discussing all possible topics we want ATAP to have a position on was inspiring; however, we quickly landed on Age Discrimination as our first because we feel it is a pervasive problem, under-exposed, and, if eliminated, has the potential to affect outcomes positively for candidates, Talent Acquisition professionals, and hiring organizations. The level of interest in this topic has been overwhelming and we have been both disappointed and emboldened to learn how common discriminatory practices appear to be based on age.

This paper on Ageism and Hiring is the product of a massive collaborative effort. The volunteer teams have invested both time and talents to compile a summary of existing research on age discrimination in Talent Acquisition to date. ATAP understands that age discrimination can be seen across cultures, generations, geography, and gender. While we would like to address this topic for all these situations, we decided to singularly focus our position. Thus, this review

focuses on age discrimination as originally defined in the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, which protects workers and, as we review here, applicants aged 40 years and older. Thus, we define the term *older worker* in this paper to refer to anyone who is 40 years of age and older and is employed or looking for work.

This overview of the current state of age discrimination helped shape ATAP’s position more fully on what Talent Acquisition professionals need to know and what we all must do to affect true change. Simply put, we believe the use of age in making hiring decisions should be eliminated completely. We dream of a day when individuals of all ages are free to pursue the level of work they are interested in, regardless of whether others may perceive them as “overqualified.” Thus, we hold that hiring decisions be made based on transparency and open market principles and where skills, ability, and willingness to do the work at market value are the only factors that play into hiring decisions. This paper will help you to make the case for addressing the issue in your organization, starting with the history and background of the problem, and starting on page 13, providing a number of practical ideas and actions that you can start to take right away to make a difference..

Thank you to all those who contributed to this work. Over the past 6 months, the volunteer teams have put in countless hours to research and qualify all issues related to hiring practices regarding age discrimination. Without all the volunteers this would not have been possible.

Thank you,

Angela Hills & Cindy McGregor

Committee and Project Management Leads

# Ageism Committee Members

Name	Current Role
Beth A. Berk, CPA, CGMA	Independent Recruiter
Alishaa Chhabra	Co-Founder
Grant Clough	Director TA
Bo Cole	TA Leader
Suzanne Helmold	Sr. TA Manager
Angela Hills	ATAP Committee Leader & Sr. TA Leader
Jodie Kirby	Director TA
Steve Levy	Technical Sourcing Leader
Cindy McGregor	ATAP Committee Leader & Senior TA Technology Consultant
Colleen Moore	Talent Acquisition Manager
Anthony Santiago	Corporate Recruiter
Terry Starr	Marketing Executive
Nisha Shah	Technical Recruiter
Laura Siversten	Product Owner
Lisa Syring	Recruiter
Cynthia Vroom	Executive Recruiter
Jo Weech	Chief People and Talent Officer
Derek Zeller	Sourcing Leader

# Age Discrimination Defined



Robert H. Butler coined the term *ageism* in 1969 as a set of beliefs, stereotypes, and prejudices held against individuals or groups based on their age (Butler, 2005). Whenever age influences how people are treated, whether it be because they are older or younger, age discrimination is at play, and this form of discrimination occurs everywhere and in all aspects of life. Like any other form of discrimination, it can be overt or subtle, but unlike other forms, this is one that sooner or later, every one of us could experience.

## Societal Views of Age

Our views on aging in general are shaped not only by the science behind aging, but are deeply steeped in the societal values, priorities, and community practices of where we live. This means that ageism is seen very differently in different communities and different parts of the world. Most Asian cultures, for example, have generally been known to revere their elders. Multiple generations living together to care for elders in a respectful fashion has been the practice in these communities for thousands of years. These practices have historically shaped a different view of older people than that in many Western societies. However, as population growth and Westernization influence Asian cultures, attitudes toward seniors may begin to change (Gerlock, 2006).

Even in Western societies, not all view aging the same. In Europe, views on aging differ by country; however, Bratt et al. (2018) found that across Europe, age discrimination targeted toward young adults is generally more pervasive

than toward older adults. That said, this form of discrimination varies substantially by country. In many countries, including Romania, the United Kingdom, France, Norway, and Switzerland, perceived age discrimination was found to be highest for young adults and steadily declined with age. In other countries such as Spain, Germany, Poland, and Ukraine, perceived ageism was higher for both the youngest and oldest generations, and in Greece, perceived discrimination steadily increased with age. It is likely that current social and economic challenges by country intertwine with cultural values to create unique prejudices and stereotypes about age in each country (Bratt et al., 2018).

## History of Age Discrimination in the U.S.

In the United States, when ageism first gained attention in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was almost exclusively considered a plight for older adults; however, by the early 2000s, views expanded to accept that just as younger individuals could have bias against their elders, those views could also work in the reverse. Today, attention to the issue of age discrimination is increasing faster than ever as our population ages and the expectations and attitudes people have about their own aging process shift dramatically. Specifically, Americans today generally expect to live longer, more active lives and work longer.

A July 2018 LinkedIn article related one person's experiences of age discrimination while searching for work; the article went viral. Jo Weech openly questioned current interview practices that discriminated against age and offered suggestions for organizations to do better to avoid age discrimination. Weech's story resonated with older workers worldwide and generated over 2,000 responses from six continents. It became apparent that this is not an issue exclusive to the U.S. but is global in scope. Libby Sartain, Chair of the Board of AARP, likened Jo's story to the one shared by a Software Engineer who experienced sexual harassment at Uber, sparking the #MeToo movement. A plethora of articles, webcasts, podcasts, blog posts, and interviews ensued. With similar momentum in the age of social media, the final frontier of EEOC protected classes, "age", is finally being discussed.

# Age Discrimination Defined

We believe it is time to address age discrimination more fully. While it is an issue globally, each country also has different policies, laws, and practices. In this first “deep dive,” we review how ageism plays out in Talent Acquisition practices in the United States. As needed, we will expand future work to explore additional facets of ageism in Talent Acquisition.

## Changes in Employment Environment

According to Ashton Applewhite (2016), author of *This Chair Rocks*, “ageism is the last acceptable ‘ism.’” Progress has been made in creating equal opportunities for job seekers when it comes to race, color, religion, sexual orientation, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, related medical conditions, and lactation), gender identity, gender expression, national origin, marital status, protected veteran or disabled status, genetic information, or any other legally protected status, but sadly, not age.

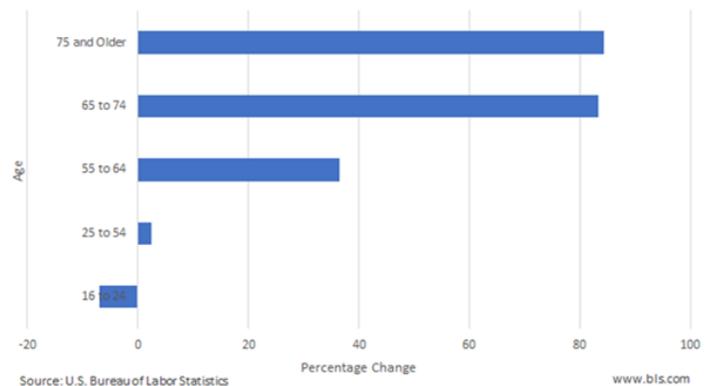
In the United States, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967 was enacted to protect certain applicants and workers over 40 from being discriminated against based on age. However, today’s workforce is fundamentally different than it was in 1967.

While there have been some updates to these laws, many feel the current laws are out of date and challenging to apply to today’s ageism issues (see Legal Outlook).

In 1967, many people worked at the same company for most of their careers, life expectancies were lower, the physical demands of most work were greater, and the workforce was significantly less diverse. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), today’s workforce is profoundly different as it has doubled in size, and is older, more diverse, more educated, and includes more females compared to 50 years ago (Lipnic, 2018). Over the next 30 years, the number of workers in the oldest age category (64 and older) is expected to increase by 75%. We are living and choosing to work longer for personal and financial reasons. Efforts are even underway to encourage older workers to stay in the workforce to combat the tight labor market we are currently experiencing by adjusting social security benefits and the mandatory retirement age (Cox, 2019).

Despite efforts to encourage older workers to stay in the workforce, several studies have shown that age discrimination is a problem in hiring practices, and older workers are not being hired as often as younger workers. In 2015, Neumark, Burn, and Button conducted a correspondence study that included fictional applicants in three different age groups – young (aged 29-31), middle-aged (aged 49-51), and older (aged 64-66) – who applied to the same 13,000 jobs online. With over 40,000 individual applications, this was the largest study of its kind. Neumark et al. found that women in the older category had a 47% lower call back rate than did younger workers for administrative jobs and a 36% lower call back rate for sales jobs. While the story is worse for older women, men over 64 also experienced a lower call back rate of 30%.

Projected percentage change in labor force by age, 2006-2016



A 2018 AARP survey revealed that the majority of applicants aged 45 and older felt their age was at least a minor determinant to being hired (of these, 45% reported age as a major reason). Among employees surveyed, 16% felt they were not granted a promotion because of their age (Ziv, n.d.). One explanation for these results is bias.

## Bias

As some have said, to be human is to have bias. There are different forms of bias including explicit/conscious and implicit/unconscious. According to Perception.org, explicit bias stems from the beliefs and attitudes we have about a group or person on a conscious level. When explicit bias is at

# Age Discrimination Defined

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play, those discriminating are fully aware of their specific opinions about the person or group they are discriminating against and often do so in an unfair way. According to Aaron Stewart (2018), Co-Owner of Job.com, “Unconscious bias is a real issue and not the fault of the hirer, but rather the systems and processes he/she is given to work with to facilitate their decision making.”

Unconscious or implicit biases are learned stereotypes and are automatic, unintentional, deeply ingrained, and universal, and they can influence our behaviors. Historically, our ability to make snap decisions about whether something was good or bad, safe or unsafe, was a life-saving ability. Today, where running into bears in the forest or an enemy tribe does not likely raise concern for most of us, that wiring is still there, and it can lead us astray when dealing with the types of challenges we are more likely to face.

While we cannot eliminate bias, by being aware that it exists, we can minimize its effect on the decisions we make.

Deloitte’s 2018 Global Human Capital Trends study found that 20% of business and HR leaders surveyed viewed older workers as competition and impediments to the progress of younger workers (Deloitte, 2018). The report concluded that “there may be a significant hidden problem of age bias in the workforce today” (p. 52). Deloitte also warned that such bias could pose negative effects on company branding and social capital. We have placed so much effort over the past decade in developing ways to attract millennials in this fiercely competitive job market that we may have exacerbated the issue by ignoring other age groups.

Interviewing recruiters, hiring managers, and sometimes management can also help identify bias. Further, some companies have seen success in using group discussions conducted by consultants to identify and eliminate bias. Talent Acquisition professionals may identify a problem but misplace the blame on hiring managers as being biased. While this may be accurate, these Talent Acquisition professionals themselves could also be contributing to the problem. The first step in identifying and eliminating bias is to scrutinize organizational practices and analyze current laws to determine whether bias is affecting the hiring process.

# Legal Outlook - Current Trends and Challenges

Age discrimination in the United States employment market has gained more attention recently, especially in tech and other highly competitive industries. Surprisingly, the core legal framework governing U.S. hiring practices has been in place for over 50 years with the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA). While the ADEA was not amended until 1990 with the Older Worker Benefits Protection Act (OWBPA), another significant piece of legislation occurred in the interim, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. This Act adds protection for applicants, regardless of age, in federally funded organizations and is enforced by the Civil Rights Center. Even with these Acts in place, a high degree of ambiguity exists to current laws to protect older workers, and more relevant to this paper, older individuals looking for work.

Courts have ruled that existing laws do not protect applicants from certain discriminatory practices because such laws were written to protect those currently employed by an organization. This is an area where Talent Acquisition professionals should strive to influence policy makers to

update laws to better protect candidates, hiring organizations, and recruiters. In passing the ADEA, Congress recognized that recruiter and hiring manager biases and assumptions about age often result in age discrimination. Further, Congress noted that age discrimination was caused primarily by unfounded assumptions that age affects ability. To address this issue, recruiters and hiring managers must consider only one's ability to perform the job regardless of age (Lipnic, 2018).

While experts believe that most age discrimination cases are not reported, class action suits and legal cases are on the rise. With the 50th anniversary of the ADEA in 2018, the current legal climate on ageism is intense. For most of its history, major ADEA cases have focused on involuntary staff reductions, denial of benefits, or mandatory retirement ages; however, within the last decade, cases have increased to include discriminatory hiring practices (Lipnic, 2018). Most of these cases fall into several specific categories; age or experience caps, heavy focus on campus recruiting, age-related criteria on applications, and heavy focus on cultural fit.

Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA)	Older Workers Benefit Protection Act of 1990 (OWBPA)	Age Discrimination Act of 1975
Protection for individuals 40 years of age and older.	Amends the 1967 ADEA	Protection regardless of age.
Applies to hiring, promotions, wages, benefits, job assignments, training, terminations, and layoffs.	Aims to protect the benefits of older workers, including termination and waiving rights.	Allows age distinctions if necessary to perform a job (i.e., 21 years old to serve alcohol).
Applies to organizations with 20+ employees.		Applies to organizations that receive federal financial assistance.
Enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.	Enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.	Enforced by the Civil Rights Center.

# Legal Outlook - Current Trends and Challenges



## Using Age or Experience Caps

A case brought to the Chicago 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in January 2019 involved CareFusion, a division of Becton Dickinson, in which a 58-year-old lawyer lost out on a job to a 29-year-old applicant because the required experience indicated “no more than 7 years” (Stempel, 2019). The plaintiff argued age discrimination under the ADEA. The Court ruled that Congress only intended for the ADEA to protect current employees, not applicants.

Years of experience is such a common thing to list in a job posting that recruiters may not think twice when they see it. While these stipulations can be extremely helpful in screening out candidates who many not have enough experience to legitimately do a job, putting a higher end cap on these requirements is different all together. For example, stating that a candidate “must have 5-7 years of experience” suggests that someone with 10 or 20 years of experience would not be considered. Why might this be? A hiring leader or recruiter might assume that more experience means an expectation of higher pay, that the candidate would become bored in the job and be less likely to stay, or that the candidate might not have the “youthful” energy typical of the company culture. These interpretations are subjective and built on a foundation of unconscious or conscious bias against the worker based on his or her age, not based on whether the applicant can do the work required or whether he or she is willing to do the work at market value.

In this situation, the best practice is to avoid listing a maximum number of years of experience in job postings. Additionally, recruiters and hiring leaders should be trained to avoid incorporating this thinking and language into recruiting practices.

## Relying too Heavily on Campus Recruiting

One of the highest profile cases to date involves the campus recruiting practices of PricewaterhouseCoopers (*Rabin v. PricewaterhouseCoopers*, 236 F. Supp. 3d 1126 (N.D. Cal. 2017)). The plaintiffs alleged age discrimination because the company advertised entry-level openings at campus recruiting events, which are not accessible to older applicants. In the end, this motion was denied. PwC does in fact invest in experienced-hire recruiting and were able to demonstrate that older workers were not discriminated against. However, the case highlights the risks to an employer in relying solely on campus recruiting to hire certain employee groups.

Campus recruiting is an essential and highly effective component of the overall recruiting strategy for many organizations. The ability to recruit talent directly out of top universities and “build” that talent by developing them over the course of their careers has proven more cost effective than “buying” experienced talent and is often more strategically aligned. While relying on a campus recruiting program to hire appropriate talent can and should be integrated into the overall recruitment strategy, it should not be the sole avenue to find talent. Any organization that relies on a robust campus recruiting strategy should take note and ensure that non-student candidates are also given the opportunity to apply to entry-level positions.

## Using Age-Related Criteria in Applications

Another way age discrimination filters into recruiting is in requiring candidates to submit age-related information such as age, birth date, or dates of graduation too early in the recruitment process. These details are often essential for background checks but when requested or required pre-offer, they can be used to deduce the age of a candidate, which opens recruiters and hiring leaders to risk. For example, in a national lawsuit filed against the restaurant chain Seasons 52, claimants testified that they were asked

# Legal Outlook - Current Trends and Challenges

age-related questions during the interview process. They also claimed that hiring managers made comments suggesting that they only hired younger individuals. While a number of these applicants were denied employment all together, those who were hired were paid at lower rates than their younger counterparts (U.S. EEOC, 2018). To comply with the law, recruiters and hiring leaders should not ask personal details that could expose the candidate's age until the time of the offer and background check.

## Applying “Cultural Fit” too Heavily

One of the most well-known cases claiming “Cultural Fit” as age discrimination was made against Google (*Heath v. Google*, 215 F. Supp. 3d 844 (N.D. Cal. 2016)). The plaintiffs alleged that Google used an intentional pattern of discrimination against older applicants that favored younger applicants. The core of this argument was the use of subjective assessments on the “Googlyness” of applicants or their compatibility with the Google culture, which focuses more on personality than on skills and ability.

Legal cases involving the tech industry are on the rise – particularly given the reputation this industry has for youthful cultures and preferring “digital natives” over those who entered the workforce before laptops, smartphones, and the internet were standard. Many organizations use the subjective argument of cultural fit to select or reject candidates, regardless of whether actual skills and abilities are considered.

Some of the issues discussed herein may be necessary to the recruitment and placement of individuals in the correct positions. For example, it is important to determine the level of experience an individual has in a job. However, it is equally important to understand that all applicants who meet the minimum requirements should be considered so more experienced workers are not overlooked. Similarly, identifying candidates who fit the organizational culture helps to support the company's mission, values, and purpose. However, if hiring decisions are based only on cultural fit, an organization should reevaluate its hiring practices and the values being embraced. Finally, ATAP holds that age or age-related

questions should not be included in job applications or asked during interviews. Once an offer is made, this information is collected for employment purposes during the background check and onboarding process.

## Is Reform Needed?

A big question is whether we need to change the laws to better reflect today's employment landscape or whether we simply need to enforce current laws more effectively. Those advocating for reform believe that the ADEA must be re-written to cover applicants and employees more overtly. When these policies were put in place, most employees worked at the same company for the bulk of their careers and hiring decisions were far more often made between existing employees vying for promotions. Today, a greater number of experienced hires are external. It is possible that the originators of the ADEA did not intend to exclude applicants but simply did not anticipate how the employment landscape would change over time.

The age of the older worker is another element of the current ADEA that may need some review. Is someone aged 40 really considered older today? With so many people working longer, often well into their 60s and 70s, some recommend that legally, we should consider changing the age at which these laws apply. Add to this the ambiguity around how courts uphold current laws and there could be a real need for Congress to redefine the intent of protecting older applicants and employees from discrimination.

Others believe that updating these laws would have limited effect on reducing age discrimination. The laws in place today are poorly followed and only a fraction of real age discrimination cases is reported. Some question whether legal changes will truly change behavior or whether a stronger focus on the organizational benefits of creating age-diverse workforces is the only way to eradicate age discrimination (see *The ROI of Hiring Older Workers*). Still others believe that the best course of action is to understand the needs of this demographic and adapt hiring practices to attract and retain these individuals.

# The Needs of Older Workers



Following the lead of popular tech firms, American companies have spent considerable time, effort, and money creating organizational cultures to attract younger workers. Over the past 20 years, the proliferation of casual work environments and perks including regular happy hours, pet-friendly work environments, onsite services designed to keep people at work around the clock, and game rooms, to name a few, have been prolific attempts to attract a younger demographic. While these perks may well appeal to a broader population, their target audience is often the 20-something worker without kids who are interested in combining their social and professional lives.

During this timeframe, much less attention has been given to really understanding what older workers want in their employment and what organizations can do to attract this talent. It is true that some organizations do not appear to want to attract older workers, which may demonstrate bias and assumptions about this population segment. In fact, some even express hostility toward this population.

As our overall population ages and labor markets remain tight, being able to keep aging workers in the workforce will only become more important. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, one in four U.S. workers will be 55 or older by 2024, more than double the rate in 1994 when 55+ workers accounted for only 12 percent of the workforce. Demographic experts predict that organizations that focus on attracting and retaining workers in this age group will have a

strong advantage against those that do not. Knowing how to get there requires an understanding of what drives workers in this age group.

## What is Driving the Need to Work Longer?

Many factors drive the trend toward staying in the workforce longer. People are living longer, healthier lives. According to Peter Cappelli, a well-known Wharton professor and Bill Novelli, former CEO of AARP, today's 65-year-old has the same risk of illness or mortality that someone in his or her mid-50s did a generation ago (Delbourg-Delphis et al., 2018). Planning for a retirement that could last 25-30 years is a much different financial prospect than saving for a 10-15 year retirement. Thus, financial readiness appears to be one of the most significant drivers of the need for older workers to work longer.

Kenneth Terrell (2018) of AARP reported on a survey of 3,900 retirees that found that 13% were either employed or looking for employment. Non-employment sources of income among this group included Social Security (13%), pension from employer (8%), IRA (4%), other retirement payments (3%), 401(k)/403(b) (3%), or pension for U.S. Veterans (2%). Survey respondents indicated financial reasons for the continued work, either to supplement their retirement benefits or for extra leisure/traveling money. Regardless of how they used their earnings, many surveyed retirees also spoke to the personal fulfillment of remaining employed.

The retirement trend is not likely to end with Baby Boomers. PGIM Investments found that Millennials and Gen Xers are not planning for retirement. Of all pre-retirees, 25% were not sure how much they needed to save for retirement and gave themselves a "C" for preparedness. Additionally, 62% of Millennials plan to retire only when they feel they have enough money to do so. Yet 31% were not saving for retirement and did not see the value of doing so because of market uncertainties (Szala, 2018).

While money is cited as the top single reason people stay in the workforce, non-financial incentives are also important (AARP, 2014). For example, health benefits and the desire to stay mentally active were also important reasons cited for

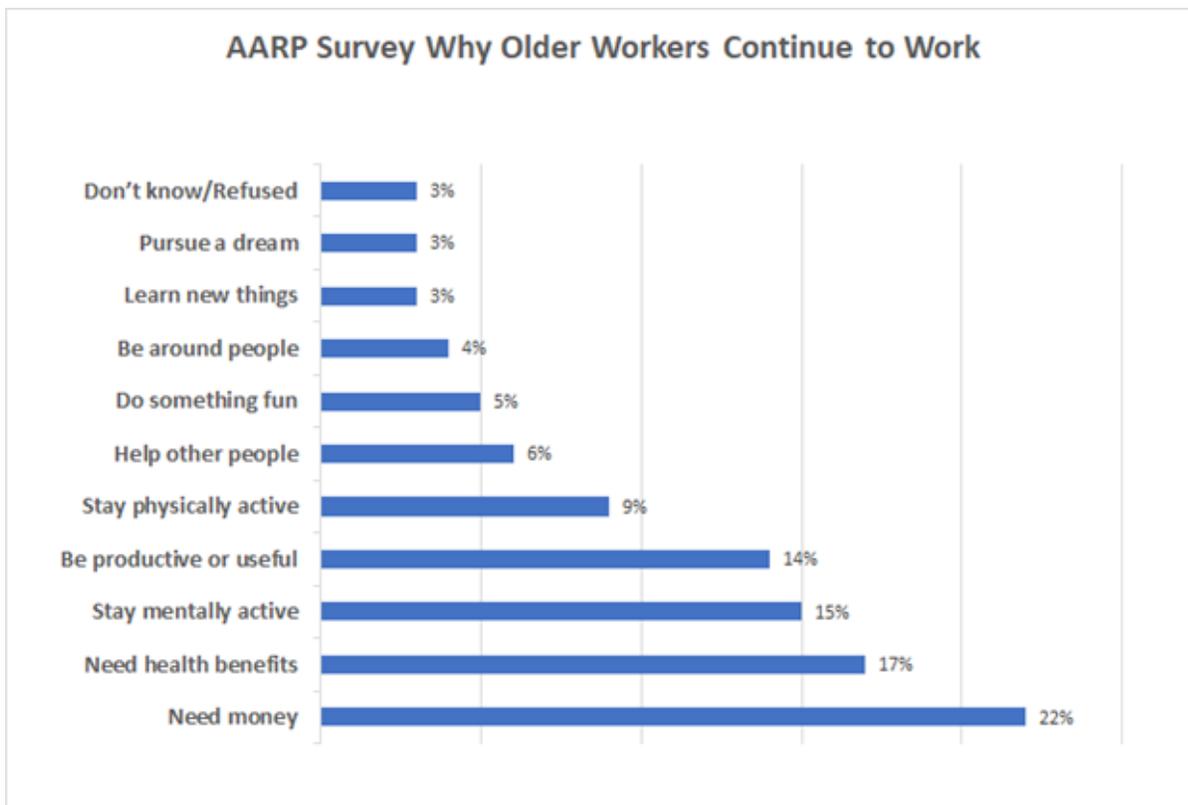
# The Needs of Older Workers

Staying in the workforce (see chart below). In fact, 39% of respondents chose financial reasons (money and benefits) while 57% prioritized non-financial reasons for staying in the workforce. A separate AARP study found that over 80% of workers between the ages of 45 to 64 reported the “opportunity to learn something new” as an essential element in their ideal job. In fact, the COGITO study found that 65- to 80-year-old workers had more stable performance on 12 newly learned tasks and reported higher motivation compared to 20- to 31-year-olds (Schmiedek et al., 2010). Thus, assuming it is all about the money may be short sighted. Designing a recruitment strategy for these workers that focuses on their emotional needs may be highly effective.

## Attracting Older Workers

Understanding what motivates older workers to stay in the workforce can be an effective start to hiring more talent from

this population. It is important to remember that like everyone else, this group of workers wants to belong. They want to see themselves in recruitment advertisements and they want to know that their contributions will be valued. Regardless of generational differences, workers in their 50s generally see themselves entering the later years of their careers but are still fully integrated employees with generally the same needs as other workers. These employees tend to have risen to positions where they have more responsibility and their compensation may be at its peak. According to Art Koff, Consulting Aging Expert, older workers sometimes have difficulty relating to younger supervisors and managers, and occasionally, they perceive that age discrimination is taking place, even when it is not. Once workers progress into their 60s and older, they may begin to see that the likelihood of retirement is imminent. These employees may begin to feel concern over whether they are still valued, and they might need reassurances that they still matter to drive continued contributions.



# The Needs of Older Workers



There are a number of ways in which recruitment practices can be adjusted to appeal to older workers. Like other recruiting approaches, they need to be genuine, otherwise they may not be successful. In keeping with this, one recommendation is it to look closely at company culture, employment and retention data, and other practices to identify whether the environment is inclusive of older workers. Ultimately, potential employees want to see themselves in the company literature and on the website. They want to be able to envision themselves in the organization through visual and written explanations of who and what the organization stands for.

## Tips to Attract Older Workers

- **Reinvent Flexible Work:** Working remotely, four-day work weeks, and flexible start/end times to accommodate school drop offs/pick up have been around for a while, but other considerations may include altering what part-time work could look like. Or, like CVS, giving employees the opportunity to spend part of their year working in a warmer climate during their “snowbird” months (Purtill, 2018).
- **Make Sure D&I Programs Include Diversity of Age:** Many organizations have employee resource groups (ERGs), business resource groups for working moms, or LGBTQ+ and Hispanic, Military, and Young Professional workers groups, but less common are groups that bring people together across the age divide to discuss relevant issues.
- **Dress Code Equality:** A casual work environment may appeal to today’s Millennial workers, but it might also inadvertently turn older workers away. It is important for organizations to remember that some people entered the workforce during a more formal time and may feel more comfortable dressing professionally when they go to work. If they can do the work, they should feel as comfortable showing up to work in a pinstriped suit as they do in a pair of jeans.
- **Two-Way Mentoring:** Older workers still want to learn, and they also love to share their experiences with others. Organizations might consider implementing two-way mentoring programs in which older and younger workers are paired to share their experiences and teach each other new skills.
- **Take a Tip from the Movies:** *The Intern* may have just been a movie, but internship programs for retired workers are, in fact, a great way to tap into expertise and give older workers opportunities to try a company on for size.

# The Benefits of Hiring Older Workers

## Advantages of Having More Age Diversity in the Workforce

Age discrimination occurs despite contradictory evidence showing that diversity can lead to higher organizational productivity and performance and lower employee turnover. Specifically, older workers often bring more knowledge, experience, and strategic perspective to an organization. These workers are also often more loyal to their employers, thus increasing the potential to reduce turnover and retain valuable organizational knowledge.

While aging workers are motivated to continue working, focusing on strategies to hire aging workers can be mutually beneficial. Many advantages exist for organizations that succeed at attracting these workers. Increasing age diversity in an organization can be an important element in enhancing overall diversity of thought. Specifically, age diversity can broaden the mix of ideas, make connections to relevant historical context, and remind teams of valuable “tried and true” best practices (Lustman, 2017). In one example, a more senior worker, on a second career after a stint in engineering, was on a team managing a client’s project. The employee suggested the use of root cause analysis to solve a business challenge. While this practice has been in place for decades, younger workers on the team were not familiar with that practice. The idea ultimately helped the team get to a better result faster than if they had not implemented that type of analysis.

Adding to the mix of ideas is only the start to what older workers bring to their workplaces. In their 2016 book *“The 100-Year Life. Living and Working in an Age of Longevity,”* authors Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott debunk many of the most common assumptions about aging workers. For example, they found that older workers are often more positive and excited about their work, while younger workers are not always the most eager to stay current with new skills. Additionally, they found that anybody, regardless of age, could be described as the “hardest worker” in the room. Other studies have found older workers to be more reliable overall, experience less turnover and absenteeism, be more punctual, have a better understanding of company culture, show superior customer service skills, and be more productive (Wharton, 2010).

AARP Vice President of Financial Resilience Programming, Susan Weinstock, noted, “As baby boomers retire, their institutional knowledge is walking out the door. Older workers are a great value to employers” (as cited in Terrell, 2018). Companies are starting to reap the benefits.

For example, Michelin developed a Returning Retirees program in 2010, which includes opportunities for retirees to find open jobs, stay connected to the community, and serve as mentors to pass their knowledge and experience to other generations (Cobb, 2013). Boeing also recognizes the value of older employees. Seeing the need for skilled mechanics, the company turned to retirees to work on short-term, temporary projects (AARP Bulletin, 2018).

## The ROI of Hiring Older Workers

When all is said and done, does a strategy to hire older workers really outweigh the cost of doing so? In today’s world of increasing healthcare costs, a pessimistic view of potential changes leads to the possibility that organizational leaders worry about raising their overall healthcare costs when the average age of their employee base increases. However, this is not necessarily the case as healthcare costs for older workers may be less than that of younger workers (Emek, 2019). For example, older workers often only require health care benefits for themselves versus younger workers who may require family benefits. Additionally, companies may be able to offer older workers work from home opportunities with minimal, if any, benefits (Emck, 2019).

Added to this is the commonly held belief that older workers have higher salary expectations. After years of annual cost of living increases and decades of promotions and merit increases, workers in their 50s or 60s earn, on average, more than those in their 20s or 30s. According to BLS data, the average salary of a worker between the ages of 20-24 is \$29,962. Average salaries increase to \$41,256 between the ages of 25-34 and to \$50,440 between the ages 55-64.

While higher salaries may correspond to roles with more responsibility or expected productivity, what happens when these workers apply for jobs for which they are seemingly overqualified? It is easy for employers and recruiters to

# The Benefits of Hiring Older Workers

assume that such workers would not consider accepting an offer below his or her current salary instead of transparently sharing the market rate for the job and letting the worker decide. In fact, Lori Bitter, President of The Business of Aging, argued that older workers have seen market changes resulting in layoffs and tough economic times. These workers have the life experience of being asked to do more work and not necessarily receiving corresponding pay increases as younger generations are accustomed to receiving. Thus, older workers are often times more adaptable, flexible, and open to learning than younger generations might be. This generational difference should make recruiters and hiring leaders take pause before dismissing an older applicant because he or she might be “too expensive” (Mercier, 2018).

Despite concerns of increased health care costs and potential higher salaries, it is important to discuss other ROI metrics such as productivity, employee engagement, and turnover. For example, Aon Hewitt (2015) found that productivity increases with age, even in physically demanding jobs. Specifically, the knowledge and experience older workers bring to organizations result in productivity at or above the levels of younger employees.

When examining the financial impact of human capital within an organization, research has shown that employee engagement has a significant influence on the bottom line. Aon Hewitt (2015) found that engagement increases with age. In fact, engagement scores of employees 55+ were significantly higher than those of employees younger than 45 years. Engaged employees speak more positively about their organizations, are more motivated, and tend to stay at their organizations longer than moderately and disengaged employees. The Aon Hewitt study suggested that a 5% increase in employee engagement could result in a 3% increase in revenue.

Turnover is another metric that organizations measure to determine ROI of their hires. Unplanned turnover hurts an organization’s ROI because it is typically short notice, which leaves little time to transfer knowledge and to find and train a replacement. Added costs associated with unplanned turnover include lost productivity, overtime pay for remaining employees, job advertisements, onboarding, and training, which could cost a significant portion of an employee’s

annual salary. Aon Hewitt reported estimated savings between \$7,400 and \$31,700 by retaining one employee. Of note, this range includes a number of industries and four main cost factors to turnover (hiring, onboarding/training, departing employee inefficiency, and department inefficiency).

Further, Aon Hewitt noted that older workers value stability and, thus, are less likely to job hop. In fact, they found a 20% difference in unplanned turnover between employees under 50 years (49%) and those over 50 year (29%). When older workers do decide to leave a job, planned turnover allows the organization time to apply succession planning, knowledge transfer, cost-effective advertising, and training.

# Considerations When Using Technology and Tools

## Social Media

Recruiting has changed dramatically over the years. In today's market, the use of technology is growing at a rapid speed. Tools that include web sourcing, social media, and cloud-based marketing are abundant in selecting talent. In pre-internet recruiting, resumes were mailed or faxed, and access to additional information about a candidate before an interview was limited. Today, when sourcing talent, recruiting professionals have a plethora of personal candidate demographics available; between LinkedIn and other web-based tools, candidate transparency is greater than ever, and Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram all provide a glance into the candidate's world. The social media user ecosystem worldwide in 2019 was 3.484 billion, up 9% year-on-year. With the use of social media, we are able to piece together comprehensive pictures of candidates including validating where they have worked, evidence of their performance, and information on their activities outside of work, both flattering and not.

Because information is easily accessible, it now takes less than one minute to search a profile to find out about a candidate or applicant. This allows for greater efficiency in sourcing, but also encourages instant judgment calls. Based on the information we see about a candidate, we rely on our past experiences to make quick judgments about whether to qualify a candidate in or out. This is a perfect environment for unconscious bias to shape our decisions (Swanner, 2018).

Considering the existing laws, current practices, and concerns discussed in this paper, what follows are best practices and recommendations that recruiters can use to ensure that every day recruiting techniques help them find the best talent, while avoiding practices that could result in age discrimination.

## Job Descriptions and Posting

Recruitment marketing is an opportunity to demonstrate age-blind practices. This includes both written descriptions and visuals used to advertise a company and specific jobs.

Certain language can automatically discourage older workers from applying. Consider this example: "We're hiring!

## Language to Avoid in Job Postings

- Phrases like "digital native" and "a passion for social media"
- Words like "young and energetic", "fast-paced" and "thrives on deadlines"
- Cultural descriptors like "we value progressive thinking over old school ideas..."
- Direct discrimination like "less than 7 years experience" or "recent grads"

Company XYZ is currently looking for **energetic young adults** to join our team of onsite destination staff members. Are you ready for your next amazing job?" Additionally, with the visual nature of many social media platforms, other examples include the pictures organizations use to represent their employees. For example, an organization's website with only pictures of young people may discourage older applicants from applying.

As seen in the box "Language to Avoid in Job Postings," language does not have to overtly indicate "young" to be perceived as discriminatory against older applicants. Rockwood (2018) noted that subtle language, such as "high-performer" and "energetic" are more commonly found terms in today's job postings and are suggestive of younger applicants.

It is also important that organizations carefully review where they are posting job openings to ensure the posts will attract both younger and older workers. Some websites will generate greater interest among certain demographics. For example, not all software engineers are on Github, and not all User Interface Designers are on Behance or Dribbble. Even People Search Technologies like MyLife and

# Considerations When Using Technology and Tools

PeekYou may inherently leave out older candidates from the talent pool. Thus, organizations should consider a broader array of sourcing pools. Recruiting using text messages or other technologies are not inherently going to result in age bias, but recruiters should carefully review sourcing results of all of these practices to ensure that age discrimination is not a factor.

## Video Interviewing

Technology exists that helps recruiters remove bias in hiring decisions. Several examples of technologies we believe have tremendous promise to dramatically advance diversity strategies, including age discrimination, are Hundred5, TalVista, Seekout.io, Textio, and ROIKOI.

Video interviewing platforms provide another challenge and opportunity. While some share concerns that video interviewing opens the door to visibility of age, others believe this platform provides the most unbiased opportunity available for hiring purposes. Generally, when integrating video interviewing into the hiring process, recruiters should consider all the same rules that apply to face-to-face interviewing. In line with this technology, recruiters can consider whether synchronous or asynchronous options will best meet their needs. Recorded video interviews allow multiple interviewers to review the same candidate and allow interviews to be reviewed if questions arise. These tools can be extremely valuable techniques in reducing age bias. According to Kevin Parker, Chairman and CEO at HireVue,

"Adding on-demand video interviews does more than reduce process friction and free recruiters from screening calls. We have learned from our enterprise customers how simply shifting the focus from words on paper to a fuller representation of the candidate as a person can boost diversity of hires, helping skilled candidates of every age move past the screening stage."

Structured interviews are another strategy for conducting unbiased hiring. With a structured interview process in place, every applicant is asked the same questions, which ensures consistency. Further, these interview questions can focus on skills and abilities related directly to the job, rather than more subjective "culture fit" or potentially illegal questions (SHRM, 2018). When creating interview questions, employers should

first consider whether that question "demonstrate[s] a job-related necessity" (SHRM, 2018). Rockwood (2018) also suggested that interviewers provide written evaluations following each interview, which allow them to remain focused on the candidate's skills and abilities.

## Resume Biases

Candidates should feel safe by what they read in a job description that causes them to move forward with applying for the job. The tools that provide augmented writing or optimization make this possible. As we know, bias in the hiring process does not stop there. Organizations are constantly looking for ways to help their hiring managers set biased behavior aside.

The technology now exists to do just that. Managers can now review a native resume with names and other personal identifiers blocked out or redacted, known as a blind or redacted resume review. This helps them stay focused on a candidate's skills and abilities rather than gender, race, or ethnicity as may be revealed by the candidate's name.

Research has shown that managers spend approximately 6 seconds reviewing a resume. However, when a resume has personal identifying information removed or redacted, such as name, social media handles and addresses, or even the name of the school attended, a manager will spend approximately 50 seconds reviewing the same resume. During this time they focus on the candidate's experience and skills rather than making a decision based on bias after seeing the name of the candidate or where he or she attended university. "Humans are creatures of habit and we like associating with what makes us feel good and comfortable which is why we need tools to promote behavior change," said Scot Sessions, CEO of TalVista.

## Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Finally, as Artificial Intelligence (AI) proliferates, we must be careful with how AI is applied to recruiting. If established algorithms do not identify transferable skills that more experienced candidates would have, organizations may be inadvertently eliminating viable talent from the available pool. Even filter buckets in ATS systems and other recruiting tools can be non-inclusive. However, when

# Considerations When Using Technology and Tools



used properly with a focus on skill to perform the job, such technologies allow us to be “blind” to personal demographics, such as age.

Even if an organization cannot implement all of these technologies, it can always bring a “blind mindset” to recruiting by ignoring college graduation dates and age and by not assuming that anyone with a longer resume is overqualified (Mercier, 2018).

## The Use of Assessments

Assessments are often used to evaluate talent, and they focus on candidates’ skills and abilities over other less measurable criteria (e.g., soft skills). Objective data points like skills-based assessments have the potential to eliminate bias. Kevin Parker also commented on the use of assessments and noted, “significant increased diversity of hires through the addition of objective, competency-based assessments that work behind the scenes...The algorithms in those assessment models are developed to be ‘blind’ to age, gender, and ethnicity and trained to focus only on competences of the job for which each candidate applies. This means that competencies and cognitive abilities are the qualifying factors, not superficial similarities to existing employees.”

However, organizations should be careful on the type of assessments used and ensure that chosen assessments are psychometrically tested for validity in hiring. Another

consideration that is more difficult to confirm is whether non-skills-based tests (i.e., those designed to evaluate cultural fit, aptitude or other predictive elements) have innate biases. For example, a traditional bubble test designed for speed may give an advantage to recent grads who are used to taking such tests over older applicants. As with any tool or strategy used to assess cultural fit, when using an assessment designed to evaluate this construct, the focus should be on both the core culture *and* the aspirational and diverse elements of the culture for which the organization strives.

## Leverage the Data You Have

Today’s technology allows us to collect and analyze more data than ever before. Therefore, organizations should not miss the opportunity to use all available information to improve the diversity of age in recruiting. To accomplish this, Talent Acquisition professionals should review workforce data across the organization to identify whether age equity exists in pay, promotion, turnover, and performance ratings (Visier, 2017). Other metrics to identify bias include source of lead and source of hire. If blind recruiting practices are successful and age is not asked until post offer, but an issue prevails, professionals should trace the offered candidate’s sources to determine which sources of hire enhance diversity of age and which do not. Ultimately, age discrimination in hiring usually stems more from systemic or cultural issues than technology. In the end, technology does not recruit, people do.

# How You Can Effect Change

The data suggest that a majority of organizations implement diversity and inclusion strategies, but less than 10 percent address age in those practices (Lipnic, 2018). Yet, the benefits of including age diversity in these strategies appear to have strong positive outcomes for both employers and employees. To eradicate age discrimination, it must be recognized on a personal level, a team level, and a company-wide level. Optimal results will ensue if this works top-down from the stakeholder and C-Suite levels, as attempting to influence-up on this issue will prove more challenging (PWC, 2015).

In line with understanding age discrimination at various levels, Talent Acquisition professionals are expected to understand a variety of hiring requirements. To ensure fair recruiting and hiring practices, consider the following as it relates to your specific role:

- Do you and other stakeholders in your organization discuss and train on changes in legislation?
- What is your or your department's role in advising/training hiring managers in other departments?
- What is your or your department's role in developing recruiting strategies?
- Do you participate in the profession outside of your workplace?

## Start the Dialogue

On a personal level, one of your first actions can involve taking a lead role to educate others (and possibly refresh your own understanding) on the EEOC and ADEA laws and regulations. Anyone involved in the hiring process should be educated on the laws and regulations, and be kept abreast of changes, new rulings, etc., on a continual basis. Everyone involved in your hiring process, whether they are members of your internal team, external service providers (i.e., staffing agencies, contract recruiters, or RPO partners), or HR technology providers, must be made aware of your practices and expectations and kept current on policies and changes that impact your overall talent acquisition work.



You can also coordinate with your organization's internal or external legal counsel to assemble an appropriate team of professionals aimed to research and report on employment laws through seminars, webinars, e-newsletters, blogs, etc.

For company-wide initiatives, you can coordinate with the appropriate internal decision makers and counsel to incorporate language into all legal documents (agreements, contracts, etc.) with external vendors, suppliers, etc., to ensure that they too comply with relevant laws and regulations (similar to government contractors).

The above suggestions should get the dialogue going on the topic of ageism. However, there are still many measures that you can do yourself or corral a team to help disseminate company-wide initiatives.

## Help Mitigate Bias through Training

Biases exist in all of us. As a result, there is always a risk that those involved in your hiring process may be making assumptions, which may or may not be correct. Furthermore, individuals may keep these assumptions to themselves. What can be done to mitigate bias from impacting poor assumptions and help ensure that your company is not involved in or can defend itself against a discrimination lawsuit?

# How You Can Effect Change

Awareness and training can help organizations ensure they are engaging in neutral hiring practices. You can provide this awareness by discussing issues related to age discrimination, assumptions about older workers, and laws on this topic with those involved in the hiring process. For example, you may engage in conversations on common assumptions such as older workers will retire soon, they are less physically capable, or they do not understand the technology used on the job (Klein & Pappas, 2018). Such discussions allow individuals to become self-aware of their own biases and, when discussed openly, may help in understanding the biases or assumptions of those involved in hiring.

Experts resoundingly speak to the importance of training recruiters and hiring managers on what constitutes legal, unbiased hiring and what does not. In fact, such training is critical for everyone involved in the process. This can include hiring manager training on the basics of conscious and unconscious bias, appropriate use of tools and technology, and proper processes for intake calls to ensure that open discussions occur prior to and during the hiring process. As technology increases in recruiting, it is also crucial to ensure that recruiters understand how to use, and not abuse, these technologies.

## Align Recruitment Practices

At the organizational level, one can ensure that a neutral recruitment strategy is being leveraged. One suggested strategy to help find talent among diminishing candidate pools lies in filling the skills gap, which supports the hiring of older workers.

The current employment market poses many challenges for Talent Acquisition professionals, especially with record low unemployment and lack of skilled workers. Hiring older workers can help employers fill the "skills gap" -- a lack of trained or experienced workers for higher-skilled jobs.

Employment of this population also supports economic and social policies aimed to strengthen personal and economic well-being. In using this recruitment strategy, consider the following:

- Seek workers of all ages by not limiting qualifications based on age or years of experience.
- Include age-diverse photos, graphics, and content in job advertisements.
- Ensure employment applications are not unintentionally biased by asking questions related to or that could identify age (e.g., graduation year).
- Train recruiters and interviewers to avoid ageist assumptions and common misperceptions about older workers.

Talent Acquisition professionals can tackle ageism within an organization at the individual and corporate levels. Those in the role of a vendor can do so when working with clients to hire employees. For those professionals seeking to be involved on a broader scale, there are many ways to make an impact.

Finally, the ATAP offers a wealth of resources and information on its website to support best practices in Talent Acquisition: <https://atapglobal.org/>

# Conclusion

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The intent of this White paper is to raise awareness and begin to eradicate age discrimination in hiring practices. Talent Acquisition professionals need to take a leading role whether working as a one person HR/TA shop or as part of a team within a larger organization.

We feel that the results of the studies and demographic facts shared in this paper speak for themselves. The U.S. can no longer ignore those who are available to work or where they can work geographically. This is especially true in smaller towns and cities that are experiencing shifting demographics as younger workers move to larger cities for more and better opportunities. Not only do we support the benefits of hiring older workers, we strongly encourage employers to not overlook the importance of older workers in sharing and transferring industry knowledge and serving as mentors to younger and less experienced workers. Further, companies cannot afford the social risk of discriminating based on age or the legal risk of potential lawsuits.

This White Paper is not to solely put the burden of combating ageism on the shoulders of Talent Acquisition professionals. Rather, it is the responsibility of all professionals involved in recruitment and hiring to take action to effect positive change. Refer to Appendix A – Checklist, 8 Recommendations You Can do Today: Hiring and Retaining Older Workers. Start today and make an impact.

We hope this White Paper will raise awareness and eradicate illegal hiring practices that discriminate against age. We also hope these suggestions will lead to solutions that can be scaled to organizations of all sizes. Aging affects all of us and most have family members, friends, or maybe ourselves who have experienced ageism to some degree. All persons needing or wanting to work should be able to do so, commensurate with the requirements and salaries for the positions.

# Appendix: Checklist

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## 8 Recommendations You Can do Today: Hiring and Retaining Older Workers

- Assess current recruitment and hiring practices and strategies within your organizations to ensure age-neutral initiatives are in place, including removing bias that could occur when assessing talent based on resume alone.
- Become educated on the laws and regulations when it comes to hiring and retaining older workers.
- Educate those involved in the hiring process on age discrimination, false assumptions, and steps to avoid such bias and discrimination when recruiting, interviewing, and hiring.
- Influence and promote diversity – beware of “culture fit”. Work with your organizational leaders to implement a culture that is aligned to support a diverse workforce, including diversity of age.
- Advocate internally the value and benefits of older workers; deconstruct biases and assumptions.
- Avoid job posting language and discriminatory qualifications.
- Leverage technology in a way that reduces bias and discrimination.
- Seek ways to market to and accommodate the needs of older workers.

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# ATAP<sup>^</sup>

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Founded in 2016, the Association of Talent Acquisition Professionals (ATAP) is the only global, member-driven non-profit representing all of talent acquisition. ATAP established the Professional Code of Recruiting Integrity, builds a common body of knowledge for and advocates on behalf of the profession, and fosters an inclusive community of all professionals who have talent acquisition responsibilities

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