

Explore your inner ageism

You can often make serious points by having a bit of fun. Try completing our 'Explore your inner ageism' questionnaire. Nothing too serious, but it may get you and your team thinking. EFA members tell us this is a really fun and effective exercise.

Questions

- 1 You have a vacancy for a departmental secretary. Your last assistant was 19 and absolutely useless. Do you...
 - a Commission your advertising and recruitment consultants to only advertise in 'Bowling Today'.
 - b Get creative with the job description, you need to appeal to older and put off younger candidates. Use 'mature', 'dependable' and 'reliable' liberally.
 - c Acknowledge that you made a mistake with your last secretary but resign yourself to the fact only a 'kid' would take on the job at that salary.
 - d Recognise that it was not the age of your previous assistant that was the problem; you oversold the job and failed to address key training issues.
-
- 2 You are put in charge of organising a team building day at work, but you have two colleagues over 60 and you want to do something fun. Do you...
 - a Indulge yourself. What you choose to organise reflects on you and your ability to deliver thrills.
 - b Feel deeply frustrated your plans for sky diving are to be thwarted and lose interest in the project.
 - c Decide not to make anyone uncomfortable and settle on 'origami for beginners'.
 - d Don't assume physical activity is out, speak to the team about the session and ask for suggestions so you have an idea of what people are comfortable with.
-
- 3 You go to the pub after work every Wednesday with some of your team mates, then someone points out you never invite older members of the team. Do you...
 - a Explain that older colleagues wouldn't be interested in the sort of pubs you normally go to – they have families to get home to.
 - b Feel embarrassed and invite them out of guilt, at least once or twice, but resent the fact informal drinks has suddenly turned into a team building exercise.
 - c Extend the invitation to everyone in future, but make no concessions about the venue – you'll drink where you like!
 - d At the next team meeting, ask everyone to suggest an after work activity you can all do together – you are proud to be part of a supportive and understanding team.
-
- 4 You find out it is your colleague's 50th birthday. They are the oldest member of the team. Do you...
 - a Ensure their card refers to the fact they are 'over the hill' and tell them that you have warned Facilities Management that there may be a Health & Safety issue over the number of candles required for their cake.
 - b Get everyone to sign a card, but brief each team member at length not to make any age related comments on pain of a harassment charge.
 - c Decide it is far too controversial to acknowledge their age... ignore their birthday... and their hurt expression.
 - d Let them know how happy you are that it is their birthday, check discreetly what an appropriate gift might be and make a public statement that all birthdays now come without a number – 'it's the individual we value'.

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- 5** Your new boss has just started. She is the same age as your daughter. Do you...
- a** Set out to show her up. She's just a kid and you should have got this job, you can't understand why you didn't given your superior knowledge and many years experience.
 - b** Express concern about how tired she looks, suggest she needs to stop 'burning the candle at both ends' and bring in nourishing snacks to make sure she eats properly.
 - c** Have a small crisis over the fact your career is clearly over, and decide you may as well give up now.
 - d** Give your new boss the benefit of the doubt – you're sure she's got what it takes and anyway you'll give her your full support.
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- 6** Although you are more senior, you are younger than your colleague. In a meeting, clients consistently refer to them for decisions. Do you...
- a** Inwardly seethe and swear that is the last time you go into a meeting with your older colleague.
 - b** Pull rank in the meeting by sending your colleague out to do a bit of unnecessary photocopying.
 - c** Say nothing but decide next time you have a meeting you are going to make sure you introduce yourself properly.
 - d** Patiently explain that you will be making the decisions.
-
- 7** One of your team is 64 and their performance is ok, but not great. You know they want to keep working for a couple more years but you've been told by senior management to discuss their retirement at their next appraisal. Do you...
- a** Leave brochures for a Florida Retirement Village lying around and discuss loudly how you can't wait until it's your turn to retire.
 - b** Discuss their options in their next performance review, gently suggesting they might want to go sooner rather than later to ensure you don't have to sack them.
 - c** Ignore the issue and hope your boss doesn't notice.
 - d** Tell them how much you value their contribution and experience, and then discuss their options, perhaps sharing with them the research you have done on suitable training courses. Agree some new targets.

Answer Bands

Score mainly 'A's

You are overtly ageist and heading straight to an employment tribunal. You need to rethink your behaviour quickly and hope people don't treat you that way when you get older.

Score mainly 'B's and 'C's

You are passively ageist. But you have potential as a convert. When someone points out the error of your ways you immediately recognise you have fallen into an age prejudice trap. You need to challenge your thinking more frequently and take care you don't fall back on bad habits.

Score mostly 'D's

If you were answering honestly (?), you've read all the hand books and are a very conscientious manager... though perhaps a little too PC for your own good!

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