

# Ageism Is Diversity Issue

Rebranding As Age-Neutral

By Jane Genova

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Dedicated to kglobal partner Gene Grabowski. He's creating fresh templates for preventing, managing, and gaining from crises.

# Other Communications/Career Books by Jane Genova

“The Critical 14 Years of Your Professional Life”

“Over-50: The Four Monsters of the Mind”

“Old”

“The Fat Guy From Greenwich”

“Geezer Guts: Making a Buck, At Any Age”

“To be in business in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to be in crisis.” - Gene Grabowski, kglobal partner, global crisis czar



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Rebranding - Introducing Jane Genova

# “Ageism Bites - Both Workers and Businesses” - Jane Genova, Odwyerpr.com, April 16, 2018

<http://www.odwyerpr.com/story/public/10495/2018-04-16/ageism-bites-both-workers-businesses.html>



**AGEISM**

# Introduction

## **DIVERSITY** **in the Workplace**

Way back in 1998, the elite management consulting firm - McKinsey - issued a manifesto. It declared that the most important asset in a business is the human capital. That landmark study was called “The War for Talent.”

Business took that seriously. It still does.

However, over time “talent” became increasingly restricted to youth. And “youth,” documents AARP, the advocacy group for aging Americans, currently is restricted to the under-35. The rest of the workforce pool is unlikely to be classified as talent-in-demand.

It’s not an exaggeration to say that the business world in America and other locations such as the U.K. has become binary. There is youth and there is everyone who is not designated as youth.

But that trend could have peaked. And is on its way to over.

That's because it has been labeled "ageism." And, ageism is emerging as much a diversity issue in the workplace as bias against races, ethnic groups, females, the disabled, and those with alternative sexual orientations.

Ageism as a diversity issue is moving onto the radar of investors, government regulators, media, advocacy groups, consumers, the employees themselves, and their families and friends.

Here's some interesting research. A study by Boston College's Sloan Center on Aging and Work and Emmanuel College found that age discrimination in a workplace can reduce motivation among all employees not just older ones.

The bottom line: Ageism the diversity issue can throw shade on companies' revenues, brand, and, you bet, the ability to attract, motivate and retain talent.

A sign of these new times is the sustained attention my article about ageism, published on Odwyerpr.com, has been receiving. It documents the negative impacts of ageism on not only workers but also on the employers.

Here it is: <http://www.odwyerpr.com/story/public/10495/2018-04-16/ageism-bites-both-workers-businesses.html>

What has been the tipping point in making ageism an issue myriad constituencies are paying attention to?

My hunch is that it's age-bias creep. During the past five years, 60 percent of those laid off, fired, or encouraged to retire at IBM were over-40.

No fools, the companies' workforce is noticing that every one of them may indeed be on short time. Is the new career path from 22 to 35?

That could be the growing assumption. Members of iGen observe their parents being thrown under the bus, seemingly just because of their age.

The good news for companies is that public relations, marketing, human resources, and compliance can help them rebrand as age-neutral.

Partner at global public affairs firm Gene Grabowski has proved out that it is possible to prevent a crisis and to get in front of those which begin developing.

Ageism does not have to become a crisis in any company. There is a body of knowledge derived from managing other diversity issues which companies can leverage. This book guides how companies can rebrand as age-neutral.

# Chapter 1 - Forget Conspiracy Theories



Millions of employers throughout America and their global supply chains didn't sit down and decide: We are going to eliminate from the workplace anyone older than 35, or at the outer limits, 40.

No, there weren't any grand conspiracies hatched. Ageism evolved into a kind of best practices - or what seemed like smart hacks - for business realities. They were raw and are becoming more so.

The economy is global. It's continually disrupted by technology.

So much of the competitive dynamics involves price. That makes brutal cost-efficiency necessary to survive. Do other things right and the business might scale.

So, it seemed and may still seem to make good business sense to replace expensive experienced older workers with less expensive less experienced ones.

Better yet, don't hire them at all. The lawsuit "Rabin v. PwC" claims that the accounting firm recruits on college campuses to exclude the hiring of anyone over-40.

Those are the pieces at the end and beginning of human resources processes: terminating and recruiting.

There are also the interim pieces.

Disciplining is one. There's that nice convenience of documenting everything from subpar performance to rule-breaking to justify an outright firing of aging employees. In addition, demotions, and reductions in compensation can shame an employee into leaving.

Promotions are another piece. No need to reward performance in that way in order to hold onto talent. The assumption is that older employees recognize they are stuck.

All that became kinds of best practices in operating a business. For years, companies which didn't embrace them could be penalized by constituencies.

One group of the constituencies were investors.

A massive layoff, typically involving long-term workers, triggered an uptick in the stock price.

Another were the purchasers of their services and products.

Advertisers visiting a media outlet frequently weren't pleased to spot too many older workers.

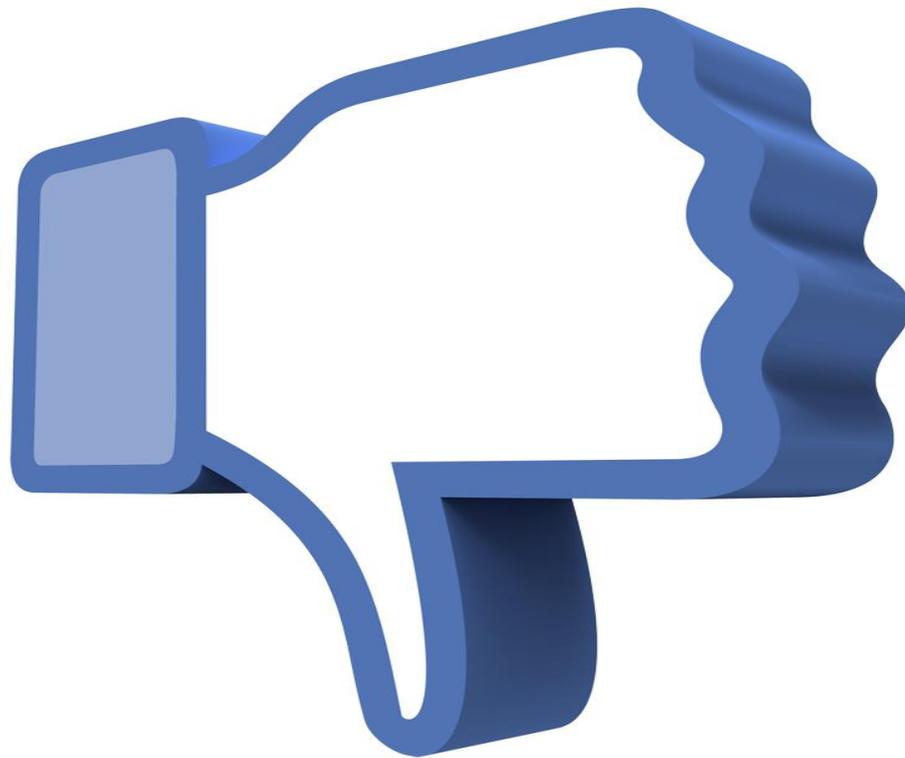
A third group were those providing services such as medical insurance coverage.

It would cost companies plenty to be top heavy with older workers.

That was then.

# Chapter 3 - Ageism Is Getting Thumbs-Down

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Now, the government is watching.

So are the lawyers.

The most recent statistics show that in 2016, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 20,857 filings contending age discrimination.

Some of them will go on to be actual lawsuits. Complying with all that costs businesses money. Also, it generates bad press. The brand gets whacked.

Since investors hate bad publicity and uncertainty (litigation is a wild card), the company's stock price could go down.

In addition, employees who sense they will be pushed out because of age hire a lawyer before that happens. They negotiate a deal, which usually is maintained as confidential. In the end it might have been less expensive for the company to simply keep on the expensive employee. About 50 percent of new hires fail within the first 18 months. That aging employee is a known entity. The odds aren't great that the new one will produce the needed results on time and on budget.

Laid off older employees wind up in outplacement and the rolls of unemployment. Those eat into the company's budget.

Those who were laid off who don't push back through their lawyers will be in outplacement and on unemployment longer than younger workers. Money advisor Motley Fool puts that at nine months longer. That not only raises the cost of doing business for employers. It can also raise the unemployment tax.

Another negative impact of ageism is that the aging employee kicked to the curb might not “boomerang” back. That’s a growing trend in recruitment: re-hiring employees who were terminated or left on their own.

The Society of Human Resources Management found that 65 percent of managers embrace boomeranging. That’s because the re-hires know the company, the culture, and how things get done. They can parachute right in. On the other hand, there is almost a 50 percent risk those hired “cold” won’t pan out.

But, if the reason for the departure had been associated with age bias, resentful employees might not boomerang back. Training those who have no knowledge of the company adds on cost.

What else can impact the bottom line is if those in that termination loop - layoffs are a family affair - stop buying products or services. If they badmouth the company effectively through social media a purchasing boycott can extend beyond the original circle of family and friends.

Such a push-back can catch fire.

Many recall how Susan Fowler's blog post on alleged sexual misconduct at Uber eventually did in the chief executive officer Travis Kalanick. Frequently former employees do go on social media about alleged age bias.

Some day one or more of those initiatives, as did Fowler's, can capture the attention of the consumers, regulators, investors, and the establishment media. That's a risk companies are taking which engage in ageism.

In addition, if companies hired consultants to measure internal morale, they might be handed a chilling report. Bonds develop among workers, even in this dog-eat-dog time in capitalism.

Previously was mentioned the research by Boston College's Sloan Center on Aging and Emmanuel College.

The finding that many employees were turned off by the lack of fair play shouldn't surprise. After all, scientists have documented the existence of mirror neurons. Human beings affect other human beings at the cellular level. Mankind is truly a social animal.

Ironically, that social aspect humans extend to robots.

The one hired for customer services in a supermarket in Scotland didn't perform its duties according to specifications.

The robot's name was Fabio. After the brass fired Fabio and he was escorted out the door some employees cried.



# Chapter 3 - Companies Can Take Quick Audit to Prevent Crisis

AUDIT



Companies which are experiencing ageism challenges are sitting ducks for trouble.

A full-blown crisis could occur.

Obviously, those age-bias policies and behaviors are not going unnoticed. Not any more.

And lots more data will be turned up.

Thanks to the Internet, laypersons have acquired the know-how of journalists and private investigators to probe for supposedly confidential documents and to gain access to sources.

Internally, employees have learned how to leak without being detected.

And, sooner than later a reformer or several of them will connect the dots about a company.

If those crusaders are savvy about social media and/or getting placements in establishment media the evidence of ageism will become public.

Since the subject is becoming sexy, that story could make it to the ABC Evening News with David Muir.



The good news is that it is possible for a company to do an audit and do an emergency fix for problems.

It can set up a committee, put on fast time, composed of lawyers, human resources experts, and public relations staff.

It can also hire outside consultants or coaches to review policies, practices, and systems and make recommendations.

What should the audit focus on? The bare minimum includes the following categories.

*Language.*

Language is the visible layer of the corporate culture. Words and phrases which reflect conscious or unintentional age bias poison the well.

NoNo Language includes:

“Young.” Replace with “energetic,” “passionate,” and “cool.”

“Recent college graduate.” Replace with “X years of experience or entry level.”

“Overqualified.” Replace with “this position requires X years of experience and no more.”

“Knowledge of technology.” Replace with specifications about the software requirements, such as “This job demands advanced level experience with Excel.”

“Baby Boomer.” Replace with “multi-generational workforce.”

“Inflexible.” Replace with “No evidence of initiative.”

“Age.” Replace with “at what phase in a career path.”

“Discipline.” Replace with “coaching recommended.”

There is language which is used in formal ways such as the help-wanted ads and the employee handbook.

That is easy to modify, then control.

Less easy are the informal conversations. And they could be doing the most harm to older employees - and be breeding grounds for litigation.

Typical are nicknames assigned such as “Gramps” or “Den Mother.”

Overhauling those mindsets and verbal habits usually mandates sensitivity training. Any company could have the ageism analogue of the Starbucks’ racist crisis.

## *Human Resources Systems*

How human resources operates can be made transparent.

That covers recruitment, hiring, disciplining, raises, bonuses, promotions, firings, reductions-in-forces, and retirements. Such an exercise can reveal unintentional forms of ageism. And course correction can be done.

For example, recruitment policies can be described in detail. Where does the company search for talent and why in those ways? If there is no or little “mix” then that’s an opportunity to broaden the scope of the search.

A company might do 80 percent of hunting by visiting college campuses. That raises a red flag about not giving older professionals a shot at a job.

Promotion is also a hot-button issue.

The company must analyze its processes for preparing employees for promotion and then the actual selection process. The details, including what aspects are subjective, can be clarified. Constituencies hunger for authenticity.

Currently, some over-40 employees perceive evaluation procedures such as formal performance appraisals as adversarial.

Not only does the process seem geared to end the careers of highly compensated workers. A growing number of employees don't find the feedback helpful in enhancing their skills.

For example, should penalty-free confidential coaching be made available for employees over-40 who are losing influence and promotability in the company?

## *Silo Effect*

A simple visual inspection of who's interacting with whom reveals if there is a silo effect in the company.

What's usual is for those under-40 to cluster together. That prevents the flow of information, perspectives, and ideas among generations. And, that creates blind spots in the company.

Had there been more of a generational mix at Facebook, the advertising model which relies so much on user data might not have been permitted.



At the New York Times Company had there been more under-40 in leadership positions it might not have been so late to the digital game.

Reducing the silo effect isn't rocket science.

The assignment of office space can mix generations.

Team projects, especially those involving travel, would be multi-generational.

Recreational activities such as Friday fun, employee sport teams, and formal special events should be made multi-generational-friendly.

## *Leadership*

Yes, the structures of corporations now push down power to lower levels.

But the person at the top still has enormous influence. Otherwise, there wouldn't be so much churn in the position of chief executive officer (CEO). Just in the first five months of 2017, reports executive search firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, 470 CEOs were replaced.

Of course, the CEO sends the company the message if ageism is okay or not okay. Therefore, the audit must investigate the content of messaging from the top.

# Conclusion



Once a situation goes from an irritant to a crisis, the momentum usually escalates rapidly.

Constituencies, ranging from the media and elected government officials to disgruntled employees and professional agitators, smell blood in the water.

The good news is this: Crisis can be prevented. Companies can do that by being aggressive in rebranding as age-neutral.

The key piece is: Companies must make it their business to remain in that age-neutral mindset. That means continually monitoring and doing course correction.

Sliding back to what was is the typical dynamic. Those famous corporate turnarounds, be they at Chrysler or GE, returned to dead zones.



The value I bring to rebranding is that I am both a communications expert and a coach for aging professionals.

My name is Jane Genova



## **APPROACH:**

Action-oriented. Structured around five questions: Where is the company now, where does it need or want to be, how does it get there, what are the results, so far, and how can they continually be improved

## **NEW BOOKS:**

“Over-50: The Four Monsters of the Mind”- <http://over-50.typepad.com/over-50/2018/04/ageism-bites-.html>

“Old” - <http://over-50.typepad.com/over-50/2018/04/old.html>

**EARLIER BOOKS:**

“Over 50: Pioneers in the New Wild Wild West.”

“The 14 critical Years of Your Professional Life”

“Geezer Guts, Making a Buck, At Any Age”

“The Fat Guy from Greenwich”

## **WEBSITES:**

<http://over-50.typepad.com/over-50/>

<https://wordpress.com/post/agingonyourownsthecoach.wordpress.com>

[http://lawandmore.typepad.com/law\\_and\\_more/](http://lawandmore.typepad.com/law_and_more/)

<http://janegenova.com>

## **ARTICLES PUBLISHED ON AGEISM:**

<http://www.odwyerpr.com/story/public/10495/2018-04-16/ageism-bites-both-workers-businesses.html>

<https://www.firstsun.com/2018/03/25/career-olderworkers-manage-phoneinterview-not-sound-old-need-know-two-things-one-present-well-general-phone-interview-two-n/>

## EXPERIENCE:

Paid coaching for diverse professionals, pro bono coaching for displaced lawyers, volunteer coaching for mothers in recovery returning to workplace, graduate assistant for two Dale Carnegie courses, marketing communications consultant for RiseSmart (outplacement/career transition), career columnist for AOL and Wall Street Jobs Report, lecturer on career transition at the New York State Bar Association, thought leadership how-to featured on First Sun Consulting (outplacement/career transition) and in Odwyerpr.com, published article for Harvard Law School alumni, and co-author of “The Critical 14 Years of Your Professional Life” (went from hardback to paperback to e-.)

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

Graduate studies in counseling and interview technique at Case Western Reserve University, contract law at Harvard Law School, advanced financial communications at McGraw-Hill, three Dale Carnegie courses.

## TESTIMONIALS:

Mark Misercola - Speechwriter

“For the past two years, Jane has helped me age more gracefully by opening my eyes to new opportunities and endeavors that will serve me well when I eventually retire. And some - like writing about my passion for collectible cars - I’ve already started on.”

Tara Belsare - Physician

“Jane encourages me to examine aging with depth and wit. She encourages me to write about the process. She has opened my eyes to the fact that I am, in fact aging.”

Name Confidential - Disbarred Lawyer

“Nearly 70, I was able to move onto a new career path.”

***The Next - Complimentary introductory session. If you wish to continue with partnering or coaching, there is a sliding scale fee schedule.***

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When crisis starts, kglobal partner Gene Grabowski recommends that companies begin “talking about what they’re going to do to make sure it’s never going to happen again.”

**PREVENTION AVE**

**← THIS WAY**

