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Successfully Challenging Age Discrimination

By Elise L. Moore

When corporations seek youth instead of experience, and techies in their teens and 20s are preferred over middle-age employees, baby boomers are facing: ageism. A report published in the United Kingdom by the Department for Education and Employment stated that "those over 50 suffered the worst discrimination when it came to getting and keeping a job . . . Even people in their 40s were experiencing discrimination . . ." (*The Independent*, August 14, 1998).

In the United States where age discrimination is illegal, numerous corporations have paid millions of dollars to former employees who have successfully proven ageism. As one specialist in age discrimination issues warned, "Business leaders [need to] wake up to the fact that age discrimination is a critical issue demanding immediate action. . . ." (Sheldon Steinhauser, *Business Wire*, March 4, 1998).

At my first corporate job, I became aware of ageism. One morning envelopes with pink slips appeared on desks throughout the building. The recipients were summarily dismissed. Everyone was shocked, and the remaining workers were frightened. It wasn't lost on me that every employee fired looked over 50.

A few months later, a terminated employee appeared in our department. He had successfully waged a lawsuit claiming age discrimination, and he was back at work. He had proved in court his ability to do the job. And he continued working until his normal retirement.

Is the court system the only way to fight ageism in the workplace? While the law may support justice, there is another weapon in the fight against ageism, and that is prayer. Prayer is not just petitioning God to help us find a job or keep one. Effective prayer is not praying that someone else change his or her mind. But prayer is humbly turning to God, the divine Mind, and allowing God to change our thoughts. And this means first turning away from the disturbing details. In praying about age discrimination in the workplace, we can begin with our own views of the situation. There's a

tendency for older or experienced employees to believe that the way they've done things is the best way. That any change or suggestion for improvement implies condemnation or lack of appreciation for past performance. So the seasoned worker might resist new methods as unnecessary or as too much work to learn. Many an employee has quit or moved on when the department installed a new system or changed procedures.

Turning to divine Mind for guidance and inspiration can bring comfort in times of change. This type of prayer is not so much telling God our view of what's happening—and how much we resent it—as it is opening our thought to God's views. Divine Mind is the infinite intelligence of the universe. God being infinite, God's ideas are constantly appearing, continually evolving. The divine intelligence can't run out of ideas. The appearing of fresh concepts is natural. It isn't a condemnation of yesterday's concepts. It's progressive building, from one right idea to the next.

Through prayer, we can perceive that the changes we face are often really progressive. We can pray to not resist new ideas simply because they are different or because we didn't initiate them. That kind of prayer removes prejudice against progress.

Have you ever considered that creativity and innovation are proof that God is alive? For God to be creative and to be infinite, creation must continue to take place. Without newness, the divine Mind would be static, sterile, dead. But God isn't dead! God is vibrantly alive, divine Life itself! So spontaneity and freshness are inherent in God. And they must be expressed in our daily life as the evidence of God's creative presence.

Recognizing that the new views we get of how to do things and the new methods we develop may indicate God as present in our lives, can help us be open and receptive to change. It helps develop an outlook on life that is free from self-righteousness—that quickness to criticize another's opinion and slowness to change our own. Of course not all change is divinely inspired. But removing our own resistance clears away prejudices based on age and experience. The people who accept new views and fresh ideas as natural can help themselves and other people discern which concepts are truly progressive.

A friend of mine overcame age discrimination by prayerfully challenging prejudices in his own thought. After working for a corporation for many years, he was told that he would be promoted when the manager retired.

Years passed. When the manager finally retired, a younger man was brought in to take the position. It seemed an obvious case of age discrimination. My friend had been a loyal employee for several decades. Hadn't he been promised the position? He felt hurt and angry.

Then he reacted. He resisted the changes the new manager instituted, and began looking for a job elsewhere. But being convinced that age was a barrier, he had difficulty finding companies that would seriously consider him. His mental attitude plummeted, as did his performance at work.

All along his wife had been urging him to pray without an agenda—to humbly turn to divine Mind. Finally, he became willing to listen for God's guidance. As he prayed, his own opinions took a back seat. He realized the need to remove age prejudice from his own thought. Instead of seeing the manager as young and himself as old, he saw them both as sons of God, without age or prejudice. Continuing with prayer, he recognized that his boss expressed creative ideas from divine Mind just as he did. This helped him decide to try the innovations that the new man suggested.

After a period of struggling with new technology and methods, my friend's productivity started soaring. Within months, he was given a series of large raises. Having overcome his own prejudice about age, he discovered that the new man and he had qualities in common, and they became friends.

Within a few years, a choice position opened in a place where my friend longed to live. Although the corporation was not transferring employees and specifically requested a younger man, the manager promoted my friend based on his outstanding productivity, his willingness to work with new projects, and his creativity.

Prayer promotes progress in our jobs and careers and lives. My friend's willingness to overcome prejudice and age discrimination in his own thought opened the way for this advancement. Progress comes to us in proportion to our willingness to change what we think. As we embrace worthwhile innovation and creativity as natural expressions of God—divine Life and Mind—we will experience increasing freedom from limitation. We will be guided to what renews us. Our lives will be more dynamic, less static—unlimited by age or tradition.