



65 Not so long ago it was the age to retire. Now people are going back to work

NADINE WILLIAMS

OLDER workers, some beyond retirement age, are hot property for recruiters looking to fill widening job gaps caused by the skills shortage.

Business leaders say more value is being placed on the stability and attitudes of workers with maturity and life experience.

Business SA chief executive Peter Vaughan said ageist attitudes were changing "because necessity is the mother of invention".

Smart employers would seek out older workers because of their valuable life experience.

"If you take all of those wise grey hairs out of the economy you remove from the workforce all the people who have lived through all these (tough) circumstances," he said.

"Life experience is a great teacher; it is fundamental to the workplace of the future.

"The smartest employers will have a huge advantage if they pinch the best of those . . . valued (older) workers who have had experience of the tough times."

Locher Human Resources chief executive officer Christine Locher also has seen a change in attitudes.

"We have seen a shift in people's mindsets about employing older

workers because the ageing population means they must broaden their pool of talent from which to select," she said.

"There is an increased understanding that the older worker has some wonderful transferable characteristics which are welcome in the workplace.

"When there is skills shortages and an ageing demographic, wise employers will tap into the skills, experience, maturity and capability of the older worker to benefit their businesses."

When Mrs Locher needed a new receptionist, she ignored the position's typical age demographic and head-hunted Judie Bilske, 65, for the job.

"We wanted certain attitudes and characteristics - professional presentation, enthusiasm to deliver her personal best and a can-do attitude towards high quality service, and that descriptor doesn't have an age attached to it," Mrs Locher said.

Mrs Bilske, who worked with Mrs Locher 20 years ago, was delighted to be headhunted by the agency, which employs 50 staff.

She has been on the job two months and has no plans to retire any time soon. "It isn't an option . . . I much prefer to keep working as long as I can hold a job," adds Mrs Bilske.



LIFE EXPERIENCE: Locher Human Resources general manager Nichole Tierney with receptionist Judie Bilske yesterday.
Picture: NAOMI JELICOE