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The Concealed Discrimination in the Tech Industry

Numerous types of discrimination and segregation exist in today’s world. One we don’t often hear of is ageism. For something that isn’t frequently discerned, it is present in the undertones of everyday life, but is predominant in the software industry. Ageism is harder to identify compared to other forms of discrimination that we see each day, such as racism, which are easier to recognize. It is a well-known fact that there are many preconceptions about older employees in the tech industry. These stereotypes may occasionally be true, but quite a bit of the time, they aren’t accurate. This problem doesn’t just play a role in current times but will continue to prevail far on in the future for so many generations to come, with AI consuming more jobs in the future as technology advances.

Establishing that there are many stereotypes and preconceptions about ageism, acknowledging that many of which are horrendously inaccurate. It is clear to see why the issue of ageism is more prominent in the tech industry compared to others. The technology industry is constantly changing and evolving each day, and the “experience” that comes with most older workers might not be as appreciated. Companies are incorrect to assume that experience insinuates at a limited skillset. Employers tend to hire younger employees for what they believe is lower cost for them and more creative ideas. However, technology changes so rapidly that skills generally considered as the latest can swiftly become outdated.

With many notable voices saying things like, “I want to stress the importance of being young and technical. Young people are just smarter,” as Mark Zuckerberg (the CEO and founder of Facebook) once said, ageism discrimination is fueled and passed off as acceptable, if not as the smarter thing to do. Many of the Silicon Valley companies appear to be following the same misguided train of thoughts. 227 people over the age of 40 applying for a job in Google accused the company of age discrimination in a now settled lawsuit. Each of these 227 plaintiffs got $35K as a settlement, amounting to a total of $11 million. Though Google was able to settle this lawsuit, Google refused to admit to the allegations of age discrimination. This might have been more plausible, if not for the fact that this is far from the only accusation that Google has faced.

There are multiple current solutions that people refer to to “combat” ageism, such as getting plastic surgery, trying to not show outdated skills or irrelevant skills on your resume, or to not mention your age. However, all of these “solutions” attempt to hide your real age, and to cover up, which your employer will eventually discover either way if they were to view you as a potential candidate. Solutions like these aren’t adequate solutions, if they don’t combat ageism, but tell people to make themselves look younger. A potential solution that addresses the issue of ageism instead of the age of the people would be to have each of the roles in a team reserved for an employee in a specific age group. For example, 40% of a team could consist of employees in the age range of 20-30, 30% in the age range of 30-50, and the remaining 30% could consist of employees older than 50. This solution could start to take root by being used on a trial basis for established companies, if successful in preventing ageism in the hiring and employment process, this solution can progress and continue to expand. With age diversity like this in a company and team, a variety of skillsets are offered. Diversity in a team can help younger employees understand things better because they can be trained by the employees with more experience. This would benefit both younger and older employees, allowing performance, productivity, and innovation to increase.

When I am old enough to face age discrimination, I wouldn’t want to live in a world where the only career options would be to work in the tech industry, and face ageism discrimination as young as 29, that could potentially put so many people in a state of unemployment.

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