

<https://strianews.com/fighting-ageism-a-call-for-long-term-action/>

## **Anti-ageism efforts are gaining momentum; now what can be done to sustain them?**

Something radical is happening in the civil rights movement against age discrimination. After years of enduring widespread social prejudice, older adults and their generational allies are becoming more aware of grassroots and establishment initiatives to promote aging as a natural and therefore acceptable condition of life, and these efforts are gaining momentum.

Can this anti-ageism momentum last, or will it slowly fade? The answer lies in whether or not individuals, organizations, businesses, and the public as a whole commit to taking long-term action to sustain it.

### **Creating Personal Strategies**

Any movement aimed at gaining ground over time must rely on individuals who are aware of what they are fighting for and are dedicated to that fight. That means first overcoming ageism in their own minds. “All change starts between our ears,” asserts This Chair Rocks author and Old School clearinghouse creator Ashton Applewhite in a post from her blog. She considers working on one’s own discomfort with aging as the ideal starting point.

Alice Fisher, president and founder of The Radical Age Movement, agrees. “People should not only say their true age, they should embrace the age they are at. Nobody knows what a 60-, 70-, 80-, or even a 90-year-old looks like anymore.”

Visual cues are one thing to consider, but also important is language that promotes ageism.

Kirsten Jacobs, director of dementia and wellness education for LeadingAge, says that she “always encourage[s] people to start by noticing language. Removing phrases like ‘senior moment,’ ‘I’m too old for that,’ or ‘100 years young’ from our collective vocabulary will make a huge impact.”

Personal strategies to defeat ageism can be applied more broadly to interpersonal relationships.

Marci Alboher, vice president of strategic communications for Encore.org, advises everyone to “[h]ave an open mind about your own judgments. Ageism runs in all directions, so the next time you find yourself discounting a young person for her lack of experience, try to catch yourself. Also, try to find ways to connect across age differences, around common interests.”

There’s a reason why Alboher considers this strategy important. “A big contributor to ageism is age segregation—the separation of generations at home, school, and work,” she says. “When older and younger are in close proximity, we know that real relationships form—and ageist stereotypes begin flying out the window.”

Like Alboher, Jack Kupferman, president of the Gray Panthers, NYC Network, believes that older adults shouldn’t be the only ones involved in this collective endeavor. “It’s essential that this movement be intergenerational,” he says. “This is not a movement for older persons. It is a movement for all those aging... Perhaps, if we address the defeat of ageism as a legacy for future generations, we might be able to bring power and resources.”

### **Setting Professional Standards**

Power and resources are two assets usually found in organizations and businesses, and because of this, they can help sustain the anti-ageist movement—provided, of course, that they have set standards of practice for themselves that align with the movement’s goals.

Fisher emphasizes that all establishments should “[p]ractice what they preach. The staff of any organization should be intergenerational. Members should not only be exposed to one age cohort in their organizations, institutions, schools and businesses.”

Paul Kleyman, national coordinator of the Journalists Network on Generations and editor of Generations Beat Online News, sums up the situation: “Too many American business leaders are caught today between bad attitudes and unrecognized advantages of our aging workforce,”

he explains. “They need to recognize and dismiss common myths, such as that older workers cost them more on the bottom line.” He believes that businesses should invest in phased-retirement programs, which “offer more flexible work arrangements for older employees while enabling them to continue contributing their skills and knowledge to the company, while also mentoring younger employees.”

#### Taking a Public Stance

Even if individuals follow their own strategies and organizations and businesses improve their standards of practice, these efforts may not be enough to sustain an anti-ageism movement. A final piece needs to be put in place: keeping ageism clearly in the cultural consciousness by taking a public stance. But how?

“Talk to your legislators and other influential players that can make a difference,” urges Fisher.

“Start a consciousness raising group on the topic of age... Encourage people to interact with each other and share their stories of age discrimination.”

According to Alboher, the media should play a responsible role as well. “Aging is one of the few experiences we all share, yet so many fear it,” she says. “It’s helpful when the media portrays older people as complex human beings, not as caricatures or sad figures.”

Adds Kleyman: “[P]ublic awareness is the best ‘disruptor’ that can lead to any hope of real change. Especially important many times is becoming aware of gaps in coverage and letting news editors and producers know that they need to explore serious issues of aging beyond the cute story on the 100-year-old’s birthday or parachute-jumping former president.”

Also important to consider is the intersectionality of ageism with other civil rights movements.

Says Jacobs: “I think we are starting to make strides, but we have a long way to go. I’m also mindful that a lot of ‘-isms’ in our society desperately need to be addressed. We will all make the most impact when we work in coalitions to address differences in our society.”

Ultimately, what’s needed to keep the anti-ageism movement’s momentum going? Kupferman sums it up well: “Awareness, Education, Organization, Resources, Action.”