



BOMBAS

A PR PLAN ---

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J453 STRATEGIC
PLANNING & CASE
STUDIES

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BOMBAS

1. Problem/Opportunity Statement

Bombas' incredible growth has led to an increased demand for tech workers to support its expanding operations. This presents a unique opportunity to position Bombas as a nontraditional tech company. By targeting seasoned tech professionals aged 40-60 who have recently left larger tech corporations, Bombas can appeal to a demographic with valuable experience. These individuals bring knowledge and skills that can drive innovation and enhance the Bombas team. By focusing on this demographic, Bombas can continue its hiring practices with a commitment to inclusivity, diversity, and forward-thinking solutions. Embracing this approach allows Bombas to fill its tech positions with experienced candidates who will contribute to the company's continued success and positive workplace culture.

2. Situation Analysis

It was great to meet with you last week and learn more about the company. It is a nontraditional tech company that values community and teamwork. It works towards a shared goal of giving back through its ‘buy-one-give-one’ or BOGO structure that donates socks to unhoused communities and has teamed up with over 3,500 giving partners across the nation to successfully donate over 100 million clothing items. What sets the company apart is its combination of a core philanthropic mission, quality products, as well as a dedication to providing a positive workplace environment. The company emphasizes a healthy work-life balance, as evidenced by its high retention rates, and positive employee reviews which are unmatched by ‘big name’ tech companies. It has a score of 96% on greatplacetowork.com and ranked second in Fortune’s Best Workplaces in Retail in 2023. The company’s employees even have the opportunity to give back to the company by sharing their knowledge. The mentorship programs provide experienced tech professionals the chance to share their expertise with their colleagues. These programs emphasize Bombas’ focus on a commitment to learning. Bombas sees years of first-hand experience and the knowledge and wisdom that comes from that as an indispensable asset, not a negative. With this remarkable foundation in mind, your incredible growth has led to the need to bring on more tech workers.

Ageism, or unfair treatment due to a person’s age, is a pressing issue in many workplaces. Though there are laws in place to prevent this discrimination, biases in company hiring and retention rates still very much exist. 40% of hiring professionals admit that age influences decisions during the job application process. This issue is especially prevalent in the tech industry, with data revealing that workers aged 55 and older constitute only 17% of the industry. Additionally, the median age of employees at top tech firms has plummeted to 31 and continues to decline. Furthermore, even when employees are not pushed out of their workplaces by newer and younger faces, they express feeling stagnant and stuck in their current roles. Our research shows that 83% of tech workers aged 40-60, were not satisfied with their current career progression and felt they were not provided with adequate opportunities to develop in their past positions.

As Bombas seeks to attract more tech workers we see a unique opportunity to position Bombas as a nontraditional tech company, specifically to target seasoned tech professionals aged 40-60 who recently left larger tech corporations. This demographic, often overlooked in traditional job recruitment, possesses valuable industry experience and knowledge. Their skills, undervalued by ‘top tech firms’ who are hiring younger and less expensive, could align with Bombas. They may have experience at tech giants like Amazon, Meta, and Microsoft, and have seen the negative and at times toxic workplace culture in those companies.

Their priorities may have also shifted over the years. Their needs now are a stable work environment, a positive work-life balance, employee benefits, mentorship opportunities, and a clear, supported path to retirement- all things Bombas already provides. Partnering with this under-hired and undervalued demographic, Bombas and experienced tech workers can collaborate toward the ultimate goal of driving innovation and success within the company.

Based on our understanding of the untapped potential of this tech industry hiring market gap, we aim to expose the issue of ageism in the tech industry while showcasing Bombas's positive workplace culture through a strategic blend of social media and media relations strategies, tailored to reach our target demographic of aged-out tech workers.

Utilizing social media, we aim to shed light on the issue of this demographic's disparities and otherwise unhealthy workplace environments inside the tech industry. On the other hand, we will emphasize Bombas's own healthy workplace culture. This will be done through posts sharing anonymous voices from tech workers sharing their experiences with ageism at other big-name tech companies, in contrast to videos of interviews with current Bombas tech workers sharing their positive experiences, as well as sharing statistics showcasing age-based biases and disproportions in hiring and retention rates in tech.

By using media relations, we will pitch stories highlighting the tech industry's shady aging out process of older tech workers, as well as stories sharing nontraditional companies in the tech industry that are combating this issue firsthand and providing a positive work environment. We are focusing on journalists who have covered similar issues in the past such as Carol Hymowitz, who is writing for tech and business-focused publications like Bloomberg and the Wall Street Journal.

3. Audience Profiles

Profile: Meet Arthur Abrams, a seasoned tech professional with over 20 years of experience at industry giants like Google and Amazon. Arthur, aged 50, embodies the ideal candidate for companies seeking experienced, big-picture thinkers who value stability and a positive work-life balance. Having navigated the intense environments of top tech firms, Arthur is eager to pivot to a role that not only leverages his vast expertise but also aligns with his desire for meaningful work and time with his family. On weekends, Arthur enjoys family outings and working on personal projects, striving to maintain a healthy balance between professional commitments and personal passions. Concerned about job stability amidst the rise of AI and younger talent, Arthur is drawn to opportunities that promise longevity, authentic culture, and a chance to contribute to a mission-driven company like Bombas. Arthur is motivated by the promise of a supportive, family-friendly environment and the opportunity to make a difference in the world.

4. Key Messages

Key Message: Bombas is a nontraditional tech company that will never employ ageism with employees. Bombas is a great career choice that offers an exceptional workplace culture, flexible schedules, and a strong emphasis on work-life balance with mentorship opportunities.

1. Secondary message: Bombas has a clear focus on employee stability and positive workplace culture, creating a secure place to retire, with the retention rates and employee benefits to prove it.
2. Secondary message: Bombas has a strong emphasis on collaboration and offers many employee benefits and growth and mentorship opportunities.
3. Secondary message: At Bombas, employees can make a personal impact with their work and truly make a difference.

5. Goals + Objectives

Goal: The goal is to increase Bombas' number of top tier tech workers.

Objective 1: To raise awareness of tech career stability among 40-60-year-old tech workers who were recently aged out of their previous workplaces by 10% as measured by pre/post campaign Reddit and LinkedIn surveys by November.

Objective 2: The objective is to place three news articles in publications like the New York Times, Bloomberg, and the Wall Street Journal about the industry's shady aging out process of older tech workers by September 1, 2024, as measured by articles posted online. (Included in the articles are statements from the Bombas leadership team.)

Objective 3: The objective is to have a benchmark understanding of the experiences of our target demographic through primary research by July 1, 2024.

6. Strategies + Tactics

Objective 1: To raise awareness of tech career stability among 40-60-year-old tech workers who recently aged out of their previous workplaces by 10% through pre/post campaign Reddit and LinkedIn surveys by November.

Strategy: To accomplish the objective, we recommend a social media-focused strategy focused on exposing ageism and otherwise unhealthy workplace environments inside the tech industry, and in contrast, emphasizing Bombas's own healthy workplace culture.

- **Tactic 1:** Posts sharing anonymous voices from tech workers sharing their experiences with ageism at other big-name tech companies.
- **Tactic 2:** Videos of interviews with current Bombas tech workers sharing their positive experiences.
- **Tactic 3:** Posts about statistics surrounding ageism in hiring and retention rates in tech.

Objective 2: The objective is to place three news articles in publications like the New York Times, Bloomberg, and the Wall Street Journal about the industry's shady aging out process of older tech workers by September 1, 2024, as measured by articles posted online. (Included in the articles are statements from the Bombas leadership team.)

Strategy: To accomplish this objective we recommend a media relations focused strategy focused on pitching stories highlighting ageism in the tech industry and companies in the tech industry that are combating ageism and providing a positive work environment.

- **Tactic 1:** Pitch three news articles in publications like the New York Times, Bloomberg, and the Wall Street Journal on bias in hiring and retention rates due to age in the tech industry and general negative workplace culture at other 'big name' tech companies.
- **Tactic 2:** Pitch stories covering how certain nontraditional tech companies are offering solutions to these wider problems including Bombas
- **Tactic 3:** Pitch stories covering wider industry-wide and societal issues such as a lack of focus on institutional knowledge and the wisdom of elders.

Objective 3: To have a benchmark understanding of the experiences of our target demographic through primary research by July 1, 2024.

Strategy: To accomplish this objective we recommend a researched focused strategy focused on identifying how to best target our target demographic

- **Tactic 1:** Create two pre-campaign surveys by June 1, 2024, that can be posted on Reddit and LinkedIn as measured by public availability on those platforms.
- **Tactic 2:** Distribute a survey once a year to partners asking questions about positive workplace environments.
- **Tactic 3:** Identifying popular subreddits, Facebook groups, and Linked In pages so we can more effectively place our surveys.

7. Appendix: Research

Key Articles:

Bombas: How This Mission-Driven Organization Remains Profitable And Impactful, Even In Crisis Times

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2020/03/30/bombas-how-this-mission-driven-organization-remains-profitable-and-impactful-even-in-crisis-times/?sh=46a4cd0cb5a6>

A number of years ago, I was given the gift of several pairs of Bombas socks and I thought to myself, “Well, this is lovely!” But as I wasn’t in need of new socks at the time, I tucked them away at the back of my drawer. About six months later, I needed warmer socks, so I pulled them out and put them on. Truthfully speaking, from that moment to this, they’re the only kind of socks I wear, for everything I do (tennis, walking, in my winter boots, summer shoes, etc). But what grabbed my attention and solidified my loyalty much more than the quality of the socks was the underlying mission of the organization, the story of how it began and why. The vision that the cofounders have made as the foundation of all they do, and the way they apply that vision in new helpful directions, is deeply inspiring.

To learn more about how mission-driven organizations can help serve their communities in meaningful ways and also help in a global crisis like ours today, I was thrilled to catch up with David Heath, co-founder and chief executive officer of Bombas.

Prior to the launch in 2013, Heath dedicated two years to rigorous product testing and refinement to create the best performing and most stylish athletic-leisure sock available, while staying true to their mission of helping those in need. Previously, he led business development as one of the founding employees at UrbanDaddy and served as Executive Director of Membership Opportunities at Vibe Media. As a true serial entrepreneur, Heath has invested and consulted on a range of start-up businesses from concept, through launch and continued growth. David has been seen on ABC’s Shark Tank, NBC TODAY Show, Bloomberg TV and at SxSW.

Bombas has made People Magazine’s list of 50 Companies That Care and as noted in Inc. Magazine’s feature of David Heath and his cofounder Randy Goldberg, Bombas was founded to be charitable, has been profitable year-over-year since inception and only 7 people have quit in 6.5 years. Recognized for its buy-one-give-one business model, Heath and Goldberg focus intently on building a positive culture that helps people thrive.

Here’s what Heath shares about the journey of Bombas and how and why it thrives today:

Kathy Caprino: What drew you to deciding to launch Bombas, and how integral was the mission of giving away socks to the homeless in your decision to proceed with this business?

David Heath: Back in 2011, I read a quote on Facebook that socks are the #1 most requested clothing item at homeless shelters and wanted to do something about it. This was around the time that Toms, Warby Parker and the give-back business model were gaining a lot of traction and my co founders and I wondered if we could use a similar model to help solve this problem.

So, we established the brand's mission to donate one pair for every pair purchased. We knew that in order to donate a lot of socks we'd have to sell a lot of socks, and to do that, we'd have to create something better than anything else on the market. We spent two years on research and development to create the most comfortable socks in the history of feet. To date, we've donated more than 30 million socks to the homeless community across the U.S.

Volunteering and giving back is the lifeblood of Bombas, and the reason why we started this business. It's what continues to drive us and continues to be a primary focus of our brand evolution.

Caprino: What business know-how and experience did you have before launching Bombas, and did that prior knowledge help or hurt?

Heath: Having come from an entrepreneurial family, I've always had a strong desire to create something from the ground up. I studied entrepreneurship at Babson College, and prior to launching Bombas, founded three companies. I feel very fortunate to have such incredible people and support in those earlier days that provided invaluable insight and knowledge—the good and the bad—about becoming an entrepreneur.

Even with this business mentorship, my co founders and I didn't have any retail or apparel experience. So, we approached product design from a customer perspective, which we think helped contribute to the brand's overall success and popularity.

Caprino: What do you candidly believe are the keys to Bombas' tremendous success? Why is it so hard for others to create that level of success?

Heath: We've been extremely lucky to have built an incredible team over the last six and a half years. You hear these horror stories of high employee turn-over rates or issues with employee retention, but that's not something we've experienced and I think it's because of the incredibly special culture we've built.

It's not to say it's always easy—there's a lot of work that goes into it. But when you listen to your employees, and approach the employee culture with an understanding that people have a choice of where they want to work, and knowing that you have a responsibility to make where

they work everyday fun, safe, engaging and fulfilling, it can seem easy at times to simply do right by the people who drive the company's success.

Caprino: What are the top three lessons you've learned in running Bombas, and what do you wish you'd know before you launched the business?

Heath: Bombas is just six years old, and over the last few years, we've learned a lot about our business and our customers. There have been some unexpected hurdles along the way, but I'm proud of our ability to come together as a team to find solutions while staying true to our core values. Here's some top lessons:

Explore hiring faster

We were a small, yet mighty team for a long time and wanted to ensure that we were bringing in great talent and expertise to help inform our business strategy. In 2019, we doubled our team and it's been great to see the new contributions that we didn't have before.

Focus

It can be easy to get distracted sometimes by thinking about the future of the business, but it's important not to do too much at once. We've been successful in focusing on doing a few things really well in order to build our foundation. Then we can grow from there.

Mistakes are okay

No one (myself included) is perfect and we expect mistakes to be made sometimes. At Bombas, we are very transparent with our team when we may have missed the mark and think that it's valuable to debrief on these mistakes in order to learn from them and move forward.

Caprino: What can you tell new or would-be entrepreneurs about the challenges they'll be facing in running a mission-driven organization?

Heath: It's never too late for companies that haven't started out this way to incorporate social good values into their current business models. The most important thing for companies that are looking to make a change is to have an authentic and genuine connection to that cause. If it feels forced, then it's probably not the right move.

If you have a cause in mind, get close to it and experience your mission firsthand. You'll learn so much and when you speak about it to your customers, it will be an authentic and consistent message.

Caprino: After designing the "best socks in the world" what else do you want to innovate and disrupt? And what are the key steps to top innovation, from your perspective?

Heath: At Bombas, we consider ourselves experts in comfort. We care tremendously about the quality of our products, and design our products to be inclusive, thoughtful, fun and focused on comfort. This is the number one reason why people buy Bombas and keep coming back.

While we started with and are known for our extremely comfortable socks, we launched into apparel last Spring with a better version of the everyday t-shirt. And with the expansion of Bombas offerings comes an evolution in our mission where we will continue to provide thoughtfully-designed products that the homeless community needs most.

As a brand for the homeless community, it was extremely important that we took the same thoughtful approach to designing products for paying customers as we do our donation items for those that we serve. With our donation products, we work with our Giving Partners and spend the time to create a product that is thoughtfully made for those living on the streets. Every donation item includes an antimicrobial treatment to help with the growth of fungus, reinforced seams, and darker color for less visible wear.

It's important to us that we continue approaching design from the lens of the customer for both product and donation items as we look at ways to improve and innovate Bombas offerings. We want to make people more comfortable in their everyday lives, and that's always been a priority for us.

Caprino: How important to your company's success is the work culture you've created? What do you feel are the top three requirements for an amazing culture that creates impact and makes a difference in the world?

Heath: So much of Bombas's success is because of our incredible team of 140+ employees. Since day one, creating an inclusive, fun and positive work environment has always been a top priority for us. We realize our employees have a choice in where they choose to work, and we know we owe them more than just a paycheck. We want our team to feel challenged, fulfilled, and happy—and we really go above and beyond to make that happen. Our brand mantra is 'Bee Better' and we hold ourselves to that same standard when we think about the culture we create here.

Bombas is an amazing place to work with such a close-knit, but ever-expanding, group of people who are smart, passionate and caring. I'm inspired by each of them every day. A few things we've focused on include:

Trust: We've always instilled a high-level of trust in each person, which in turn has created a positive environment of transparency, inclusivity, collaboration and most importantly, friendship. Each person's connection to the full business strategy and mission helps everyone understand what they're working towards and how their contributions ladder up to the overall business.

Open communication and workspace: I've always loved an open workspace that's inviting and encourages constant communication, innovation, and collaboration. When moving into our new office after outgrowing our last one, we spent a lot of time ensuring the space feels open, bright, comfortable and welcoming for everyone who walks through those doors every day.

Build a collaborative team of shared values: Work hard and most importantly, build a team around you that shares your same values and goals. Recognize your areas of weakness, ask for help and hire people who are smarter than you. You're only as good as the team you surround yourself with.

Caprino: Where do you think diversity fits into that?

Heath: Bombas was founded on improving the community where we work and live, and for us, that starts within the four walls of our office. We are a diverse and inclusive place to work and really value having employees from all walks of life who contribute immensely to the great work we do here. In addition to company-wide initiatives that unite our team members (in monthly giving events and biannual retreats), we are constantly striving to make everyone at Bombas feel seen and heard.

Caprino: In these times of navigating through a global pandemic, what has Bombas done to help?

Health: As a brand for the homeless community, Bombas remains committed to helping these individuals who are at the greatest risk and most susceptible to COVID-19 right now.

In addition to the brand's mission to donate a specially-designed item for every item purchased, Bombas is working hard to support those in need during this particularly difficult time starting in their local community, New York City— also the U.S. epicenter of the COVID-19 spread.

The company's recent initiatives include:

- Donating 10k pairs of socks to Department Of Homeless Services outreach workers in all five NYC boroughs.
- Donating non-perishable items and fresh groceries to The Bowery Women's Residence and Samuel Proctor Family Residence in NYC.
- Distributing 100k+ pairs of socks to the Food Bank of New York City to be offered alongside food services.

- Sending Bombas compression socks to doctors and nurses at Mount Sinai Hospital.
- Working with organizations that help those in need, like Second U Foundation, to provide Bombas employees with virtual fitness sessions and other benefits while at home.

Caprino: Any last words for thought leaders, entrepreneurs and individual workers and contributors who want to make a big difference in the world?

Heath: Find something you're really passionate about and do it well. Especially early on, it's easy to get distracted and excited about a lot of different ideas, but it's important to stay focused to succeed.

For more information, visit [Bombas.com](https://bombas.com).

From Mission to Millions: How Bombas Leveraged its Company Mission to Find Success

<https://mission.org/up-next-in-commerce/from-mission-to-millions-how-bombas-leveraged-its-company-mission-to-find-success/>

As Randy Goldberg says, 'no one dreams of going into the sock business.' But if there is one sock company you can name off the top of your head, it's probably the one Randy built with co-founder Dave Heath. Bombas Socks has grown from a small Ecommerce company with a mission into a \$100-million dollar enterprise, and the success they've had all boils down to remembering the fundamentals.

On this episode of Up Next in Commerce, Randy takes us through his journey to Bombas. He details why founders need to avoid 'shiny object syndrome' and focus their sights on the basics if they want to succeed. Plus, he talks about Bombas' culture of transparency and how to decide between leading with the company mission or the merits of the product when trying to attract customers.

Key Takeaways:

- **Bring in the Right People.** Scaling requires people — employees, execs, investors, and mentors. Lean on your network, ask questions, hire carefully, and create a dialog with other D2C companies to learn from them. Pro tip: It's time to bring someone else in when you start to ask questions that neither you nor anyone on your team can answer
- **Ask Yourself, “What Matters More?”** When it comes to getting better conversions, don't let shiny objects distract you. For example, changing the copy or placement of a video matters a lot less than the speed of the site. The faster your site speed, the more conversions you will have. Stay focused on what investments really convert
- **Transparency Impacts the Bottom Line.** When employees feel invested in the company and comfortable in the environment you create, they begin to ask more questions, buy-in to the company mission, and work harder to achieve success for themselves and the company

For an in-depth look at this episode, check out the full transcript below. Quotes have been edited for clarity and length.

Key Quotes:

“We looked at the success that Toms had been having and saw their one-for-one business model, and Warby Parker had just launched at the time and they had a charitably inclined business. ... Then we started to think about socks and we just got obsessed. We were like, socks haven't changed in 50 years. ... We thought there was an opportunity to make something really great, to really improve on a product that people take for granted, and that are an afterthought in the consumer market, to help solve a problem that's an afterthought for shelters and organizations.”

“From the beginning, we wanted to have a really solid conservative financial outlook to get to profitability quickly and build a business for the long-term. We want our grandkids to be wearing Bombas. That's one of our core values. That plays into the way that we built the business from the unit economics and financial side of things as well as the way that we approach marketing.”

“Know what you do really well, know why your company exists, why your product deserves to exist in the world, and then focus on doing that well, focus on telling the same story over and over and over again.”

“There has been a constant debate at Bombas since day one about what comes first and the way we talk about the company — the quality of the product, comfort, or the mission. Some people come for the product and stay for the mission, and some people will come for the mission and stay for the product. I don’t think we’ve solved that debate. We poll our customers and we’re surveying people and we’re thinking about this a lot, but I think the thing that works the most in marketing for prospects, people who haven’t heard about our company, is talking about comfort, is talking about the quality of the product. The mission definitely helps complete a sale, helps with the follow on sales, and our customers, people who’ve already made purchases, expect us to close the loop, report back on how we’re doing with the donations that we promise we would do on their behalf. That storytelling element helps us with both sides of it. It’s just about where we show up with the mission and where we show up with the product marketing, at what time in the life cycle. It’s an ongoing debate and we stay nimble around it, but those are still the two elements, and they have been since the beginning that show up the most in our communication.”

“The idea of what a website looks like when it’s your only store is so important. You want to have that right blend of storytelling, but you want people to be able to breeze through the checkout process the right way. That’s been a journey for us. ... You’re always building, you’re always tweaking, you’re always improving. You’re looking at the data and you’re making changes to just make it better.”

“If you were starting a direct to consumer company in 2009 and you didn’t have a lot of money that you would raise, building the website itself would have been prohibitively expensive for most brands. ... Now, if you want to launch a direct to consumer company, the technology is basically free, getting that website up, but the marketing is prohibitively expensive. It’s totally flipped.”

“We knew no matter what company we started together, building a culture of transparency, where people really understood the ‘why’ behind the business, the core values, the financial performance, what their ownership meant, and a culture of being able to ask questions, that was hallmark from the beginning. We just wanted to create the company that we would have loved to have worked at and centering our employees in the business, and thinking about them just as much as we do our bottom line. Our theory was that it would make the bottom line better. People would be more inclined to give something beyond their capacity or to continue to learn or to grow if they felt safe and supported at the company.”

“For us, it was important to really be disciplined [with ad spend on Facebook]. We knew that if we were going to grow our budget and grow our company, and we were a really marketing-led company, we’d have to diversify away. So, Hello Podcasts, radio, direct mail, TV, those are all big parts of the business now, and they’re all growing probably at a faster rate as a percentage at least of the business than our online ads on Facebook.”

“One of the keys for us is consistency. The more you’re telling the same story in different nuanced ways, the easier you make it for other people to tell your story on your behalf.”

[On the future of Ecommerce] “The percentage of people who get comfortable shopping online, that’s only going to go up. Companies are going to invent new ways to make it easier for people to buy their product, to review their product, to look at it. I think ease is the name of the game. In a world that’s going to be more and more competitive, the way to stand out is going to change. It’s not going to look like it looks right now, and having the attitude that, even if you’re doing something ‘right,’ that the way to succeed in a few years is going to be a different version of right, then you’ll be okay.”

On Bombas, Brand Culture, And Creating True Believers: How To Win Inside To Win Outside

[On Bombas, Brand Culture, And Creating True Believers: How To Win Inside To Win Outside \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com/sites/keown/2020/07/27/on-bombas-brand-culture-and-creating-true-believers-how-to-win-inside-to-win-outside/)

What do socks have to do with brand sustainability and overcoming challenges?

Consider Bombas, a company that donates a pair of (well-designed, somewhat pricey) socks to homeless shelters with every pair sold. The company is fairly young (2013), but it encapsulates so well the long term results-driven power of Brand Culture. And so doing, it's become a \$100 million brand.

"Brand culture is so important for sustainable, whole brands," says Jimmy Keown, VP and Growth Strategy Director at Barkley. "It is especially so during times of rapid change in the world which requires employees and leaders within an organization to adapt and contribute in meaningful ways while still remaining true to who they are as a brand. This is how Bombas has been able to 'win inside to win outside,' even in 2020."

According to Keown, when an organization's brand culture is healthy and thriving, the brand wins itself a competitive advantage: employees become true believers and super advocates for the brand's purpose, with the potential to engage consumers and other external audiences in truly authentic ways. Internal true believers naturally yield external true believers, and that's how brands become emotionally connected with their stakeholder audiences. Relationships over transactions.

Keown further emphasizes that the success of Bombas' brand purpose and culture are founded not merely by the opinion of decision-makers in a boardroom, but rather that the brand's culture-wide approach of 'Hey, this is what we all believe as a collective community' is what really connects Bombas' internal True Believers with the fans who buy its socks. Bombas: the preferred socks of True Believers.

"Brand Culture allows organizations like Bombas to more easily align who they are with what they do," says Keown. "It allows the brand to get engaged (participate) and activate (in a unique "Bombas" way) to both create impact and stand out in their brand category. This not only results in a company that creates positive results for communities and the world, but also a company that consumers will be more likely to take notice of."

Bombas' Brand Culture Leads to Brand Love

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen many companies scrambling to sustain customer engagement and sales. While other brands were trying to figure out how to address the pandemic and "move the needle," Bombas was showing it was able to remain true to its brand purpose, Brand Culture, and sustainability. Not bad for a brand whose founders (David Heath and Randy Goldberg) started out just wanting their driving purpose to be getting socks to the homeless population.

Heath, also the brand's CEO, recalls back to early March of this year, when the COVID scare was starting to really take hold of the public.

"Companies were trying to figure out what to do to boost business," says Heath. "But consumers were entirely focused on survival needs. They were thinking about canned goods, paper towels, toilet paper, sanitary items, etc. Yet in our inboxes, you'll remember we were all receiving marketing emails saying 'Here's our new spring collection,' or 'Get outside and stay active with our new X, Y, Z shoe.' Other brands just wanted to tout their organization's COVID response. It all felt so incredibly tone deaf."

During this time of heightened nationwide anxiety, homeless shelters across the country were also under increased strain, with increased health, safety, and social distancing demands. Heath feels that in an odd way, Bombas was "built for" just such a moment as the pandemic. Rather than having to "figure things out," who Bombas had become as a brand and culture led to a natural response.

For at least three weeks, Bombas did not send out a single product-driven email. They instead connected with their audience to let them know how Bombas was able to partner with groups that work with the homeless and with other companies to make a reaching, positive impact—all thanks to the support of their customers. The emails were well-received (boasting an enormous open rate of 60 to 80 percent), and strengthened a connection between the brand and its followers.

The enthusiasm bolstered Bombas sales as well, as much as 40 percent during some weeks during the pandemic.

"For the last seven years, we'd been building a network of over 3,500 'giving partners' here in the United States that specifically work with the homeless and those at risk," says Heath. "When it came time to take action, we were just able to do a lot more of what we've already been doing, which is not only to get socks and t-shirts to those in need, but then to team up with our partners who were reaching out to us, like Cleancult. Partnering with Cleancult, for example, who had lots of soap and personal care items, but no idea how to get them to those who needed them the most, we were able to leverage our internal team, our network, our distribution partners, to be able to get soap and personal care items out to a fair number of our giving partners."

Bombas also partnered with a company known as Brooklinen to help meet a heightened demand for sheets among homeless shelters. Brooklinen donated thousands of twin bed sheets to accommodate the needs of the homeless community, which Bombas was able to distribute via its helper network, according to Heath.

"We were really set up to weirdly take advantage of everything that we've done to react to the pandemic," says Heath.

Again, Brand Culture goes beyond public perception. It should be a natural reflection of who you are as a brand.

Brand Culture Thinking

"2020 for Bombas was the year of what we call 'Brand Culture Thinking,'" says Keown. "The more a brand like Bombas can showcase behaviors that support Brand Culture Thinking, the more likely they are to achieve the successes of Brand Culture - it becomes a virtuous cycle of identifying needs, taking action and celebrating the results. While Brand Culture can be achieved by any number of organizations, at any stage of their history, Bombas' purpose-driven model and mission shows the power of Brand Culture in even the most challenging times."

How can you find and connect with your brand's True Believers, even during volatile times? One hint. Lead with your purpose.

The Bombas Story: Changing the World, One Sock at a Time

<https://www.workhuman.com/blog/the-bombas-story-changing-the-world-one-sock-at-a-time/>

"I didn't grow up wanting to start a sock company," says [David Heath](#), CEO and co-founder of [Bombas](#). In an inspiring interview with Workhuman® CHRO Steve Pemberton, the head of the innovative sock company reflected on his entrepreneurial roots and longtime desire to run his own company. "I walk around the world with my antenna up and my eyes open, just looking for

problems to solve,” he notes. “And of course, you always find things in the most unlikely scenarios.”

While scrolling on Facebook in 2011, David came across a post that identified socks as the most requested clothing item in homeless shelters. “Something that I have never spent more than a few seconds thinking about turns out to be a luxury for almost 600,000 people here in the U.S. alone,” he noted. “And millions more worldwide.”

David’s ‘aha’ moment arrives

And while the realization didn’t immediately translate into a business, he “just couldn’t shake it.” It was when he learned how companies like [TOMS](#) shoes and [Warby Parker](#) eyeglasses were donating their product to charity that his “aha” moment came. “I said to myself, ‘I wonder if we could solve this problem in the homeless community by donating a pair of socks for every pair we sold. And if we need to donate a lot of socks, we need to sell a lot of socks. And to sell a lot of socks, we’ve got to create the best socks in the history of feet.’”

Thus began the story of how a company whose genesis is rooted in a mission – rather than just the bottom line – can not only succeed, but flourish. And how this same commitment to making the world a more human place can be a force for racial and social justice. As Steve observes, “Most entities go about it the other way. They find and create value in the marketplace, and then they find the cause, the altruism. You began with a desire to do good. And to do good, you had to do well from a business perspective.”

David pointed out the word “Bombas” is derived from the Latin word for bumblebee. “Bees are altruistic animals,” he notes. “They work together as a hive to make their world a better place.” He noted that he, co-founder Randy Goldberg, and employees also donate something just as valuable – their precious time. Each employee is given 10 pairs of socks on their first day and encouraged to pass them out. Likewise, in the days before the pandemic, the company offered 10-15 different volunteer opportunities each month.

The intersection of homeless and racial inequity

“Homelessness is a collision of many different things,” notes Steve. “It becomes a social issue for all of us – as does the issue of racism.” With that as a backdrop, how does David view the current protests and social unrest?

“I don’t shy away from the fact that my life has benefitted from the fact I’m white,” says David. “And that’s a big part of this movement. As we were growing this company, we started to really focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

“We’ve always said that we’re a brand that’s focused on supporting the homeless community – a community whose voice is often silenced. Our mission really hasn’t changed as we now shift toward bringing more focus to all underrepresented groups – particularly Black Americans and people of color.”

David points to statistics that show 40% of the homeless population are Black Americans, compared to just 13% of the general population. In this way, racial injustice and inequity become merged and infused into his company’s mission. “If we don’t stand with the Black community and partners – everybody who stands against inequity and racism – then we’re not standing with the mission that we were founded on.”

For David, it all starts with “Be Better” – one of his company’s core values. It’s knitted on the inside of each sock and serves as a reminder that he and his company can always strive to do more. “That requires us to take a hard look at our own hiring practices, our own organizational makeup, our own unconscious biases, and explore how we can impact – not only our internal culture – but mandate that the partners we work with hold the same values when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

This time, it feels different

“Some of the hesitation that you see often coming from the Black community ... we know full well that we have had moments like this before,” notes Steve. “There was Ferguson. And many of us grew up with pictures of parents and grandparents in the middle of marches and protests. And here, you have a generation doing it once again.”

But from his vantage point as a Black American, Steve senses there may be something different about this moment in history. “When you talk to elders in the Black community, they will tell you that when they were marching against segregation, they never saw this kind of response from white America. Never saw this many people on the streets. Never saw the willingness to confront their own biases. And never saw a willingness to acknowledge: ‘Yes, we have had a privilege.’”

‘Altruism is not unique to any one generation’

Steve cites the distinction between privilege and entitlement. “Entitlement has a more devastating impact. It’s when individuals feel they have a right to something by virtue of their station in life. That’s a more dangerous element. And that’s some of what we’ve seen. But I think there’s a generation here that’s just not going to have it.” As he sees it, the current generation is ready to “do the grinding that’s necessary.”

At the same time, David points out that – based on customer surveys – support for Bombas and its mission is not limited to its Gen Z customer base. In fact, “it’s almost unanimously spread evenly across every single demographic, every single geographic region. Altruism is not unique to any one generation. Whether it’s spiritual enlightenment or racial enlightenment, I’m feeling pretty hopeful about where things are at.”

Finding the ‘commonality of story’

Noting the Bill of Rights, Steve believes women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community are “going to keep raising their hands and say, ‘No, they apply to us, too.’” He talks about finding the “commonality of story.” He believes that if we spend enough time with those of a different culture, a different race, and a different faith, we can come to embrace their sameness and differences.

In the end, it comes down to a question posed by Steve: “How do you help people understand and create this kind of broader narrative that is beyond labels and more about experiences?”

And while David acknowledges everybody has their own unique compendium of experience and background, “your skin color is the thing that you can’t universally change.” You can overcome many obstacles in life – even some bad decisions – but “skin color, no matter how hard you work, stays with you wherever you go.”

“Yes, everybody can have hardship. But particularly for Black people and people of color, the stereotype often stays with them. And no matter how hard they work, there will always be assumptions about them that they can’t undo.”

Reasons to have hope

As the founder of a company rooted in a mission to help others, what gives David hope in these turbulent times?

“The magnitude of this movement. And the number of conversations – particularly in my predominantly white community – about race. Conversations that are happening for the first time.”

In the end, the fundamental message that emerges from the Bombas story is this: When your company is founded on a core mission of altruism – helping the homeless, fighting racial inequity, promoting social justice – creating a truly human organization is the fuel that will drive your success.

“I was walking up Fifth Avenue, between 25th and 26th Street,” David recalls. “And this gentleman had a sign that said, ‘I’ll take anything.’ I leaned down and told him, ‘I don’t have any money, but I’ve got a pair of socks.’ He looked at me and said, ‘How did you know that’s the one thing I need the most?’”

Age Discrimination Continues to Hold Older Workers Back

[Older Workers Are Willing and Eager to Learn New Skills \(aarp.org\)](https://aarp.org/older-workers/2020/06/older-workers-willing-eager-learn-new-skills/)

Older workers perceive age discrimination at rates that are much higher than in the past. In fact, current data shows that 78% of older workers say they have seen or experienced age discrimination in the workplace, the highest level since AARP began tracking this question in 2003. It comes as no surprise, then, that 96% of older workers agree that laws to combat age discrimination should be stronger.

Older workers are continuing to learn new skills. They are also interested in future training, particularly at the behest of an employer, even in the midst of a pandemic. Clearly, employers can play a major role in maintaining a skilled workforce. Older workers are interested in those skills that are in-demand, including technology, computer skills, professional skills, and licensing.

Forthcoming analysis will include a deeper look at reskilling among African American/Black older workers and Hispanic/Latino older workers.

METHODOLOGY

AARP fielded a survey of 1,322 Americans ages 40–65 who were in the workforce or recently exited the workforce as a result of COVID-19. The sample included oversamples of Hispanic/Latino and African American/Black older workers. The survey covered topics related to job actions they've recently taken, experiences with unemployment, reskilling, working from home during the pandemic, and age discrimination.

For more information, please contact Rebecca Perron at rperron@aarp.org. For media inquiries, please contact media@aarp.org.

50 Years After Age Discrimination Became Illegal, It Persists

<https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/employee-relations/50-years-age-discrimination-became-illegal-persists>

More than 50 years after Congress made it illegal for employers to discriminate against workers age 40 or older, a new data analysis by the Urban Institute and ProPublica shows that [more than half of older U.S. workers are pushed out of longtime jobs](#) before they choose to retire, suffering financial damage that is often irreversible.

ProPublica and the Urban Institute, a Washington think tank, analyzed data from the Health and Retirement Study, the premier source of quantitative information about aging in the United States. Since 1992, the study has followed a nationally representative sample of about 20,000 people from the time they turn 50 through the rest of their lives.

They found that from 1992 to 2016, 56 percent of older workers are either laid off at least once, or leave jobs under such financially damaging circumstances that it's likely they were pushed out rather than left voluntarily.

"Many employers offer incentives to retire early, such as sweetening retirement packages," said Patrick Button, assistant professor of economics at Tulane University and a researcher with the National Bureau of Economic Research Disability Research Center. "But some employers use more sneaky, likely illegal methods to try to encourage older workers to leave, such as job or task reassignment, being [unfairly] negative during performance reviews, not providing workplace accommodations. The goal here is for older workers to quit, which would appear voluntary on the books. But the distinction between voluntary and involuntary job separations is pretty murky, since many 'voluntary' separations aren't necessarily voluntary."

Involuntary job separations can have serious financial consequences. Only 1 in 10 of the workers analyzed in the study went on to earn as much as they did before their employment setbacks.

Supreme Court Ruling Weakened the ADEA

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967 prohibits employment discrimination against people age 40 or older. But the act was weakened by a 2009 Supreme Court decision. That ruling imposed a much higher burden of proof on workers who allege age discrimination than on those who allege discrimination based on race, religion or gender.

In the 12 years preceding and including the high court's 2009 ruling, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) attorneys found reasonable cause to pursue age-discrimination claims filed with the agency in 4.9 percent of cases on average. This means the EEOC found it likely that age discrimination occurred based on the evidence it acquired during its investigation.

In that same period, the EEOC resolved an average of 18.5 percent of those cases on their merits. This means the EEOC filed charges against companies, with outcomes favorable to the charging parties, or charges with meritorious allegations.

In the eight years following the Supreme Court ruling, EEOC attorneys found reasonable cause to pursue such claims in a lower percentage of cases—3.1 percent on average. During that same period, the EEOC resolved an average of 15.8 percent of those cases on their merits.

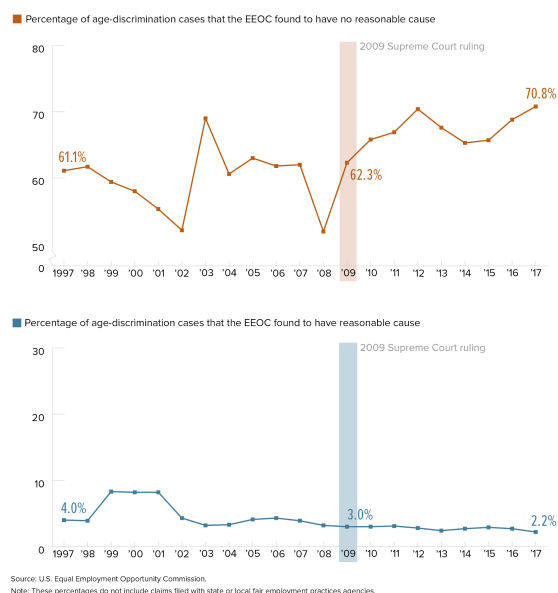
Spokespeople for the EEOC could not be reached for comment because of the federal government shutdown.

Few would defend employers who, to achieve cost savings, fire workers who become disabled or pregnant, said Patricia Barnes, an attorney and author of *Overcoming Age Discrimination in Employment* (self-published, 2016). "However, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that it is not age discrimination when employers cut costs by terminating highly paid employees, even if this has an adverse impact on older workers. The key is that the employer must show the decision is truly motivated by the need to achieve cost savings and not based on age discrimination."

[SHRM members-only resource: SHRM Foundation's Effective Practice Guidelines Series, "The Aging Workforce: Leveraging the Talents of Mature Employees"]

The EEOC Pursues Lower Percentage of Age-Discrimination Claims

Since a 2009 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that raised the plaintiff's standard of proof for winning an age-discrimination case, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has decided to pursue a smaller percentage of these discrimination claims for lack of "reasonable cause." The figures do not include cases that were settled or withdrawn.



Age Discrimination Is Rarely Blatant

In a 2017 AARP survey, a majority of workers ages 45 and older reported that they had seen or experienced age discrimination in the workforce.

Age discrimination can take subtle forms, testified Laurie McCann, a senior attorney with the AARP Litigation Foundation, during a December 2017 U.S. Senate hearing. Few hiring managers would dare say to a job applicant that he or she is "too old" for a position. Instead, McCann testified, companies engage in the following practices:

- Specifying in job postings that the organization seeks "digital natives."
- Recruiting for entry-level positions only on college campuses.
- Requiring a college-affiliated e-mail address to apply to a job opening.
- Using algorithms for online job applications that screen out older applicants.
- Capping the number of years of work experience sought in applicants, such as stipulating that job candidates should have no more than 10 years of experience.

"The overwhelming majority of age-discrimination cases today are based on circumstantial evidence," Barnes said.

Avoiding Age Discrimination

Why employers may be wary of older workers is unclear, the Urban Institute study authors wrote. "They may be concerned about the cost of employing older adults because of perceived

high salary demands or heavy use of expensive health benefits, the cost of training older adults who may retire before employers can recoup those investments, or the possibility that older adults may be unfamiliar with the latest technology and lack up-to-date skills."

To avoid the appearance of age discrimination when making employment decisions, Barnes suggested that employers:

- Document the company's goals with respect to any workforce reductions.
- Use objective criteria to make layoff decisions and take care that those criteria don't target older workers disproportionately. For example, an employer shouldn't lay off employees who don't have a specific type of educational degree if that degree wasn't available when older workers graduated from college.
- Avoid comments or actions that reflect negative stereotypes about older workers, such as excluding an older employee from career-advancing projects that require sophistication with computers.
- Conduct a statistical analysis to ensure any workforce reductions don't have a disparate impact on older workers. This is how courts assess whether a pattern of discrimination exists in race- and sex-discrimination cases.

In the decade since the Supreme Court made it harder to prove discrimination, EEOC pursues fewer percentages of claims

An Employment Lawyers' Perspective on Age Discrimination in Silicon Valley

[An Employment Lawyers' Perspective on Age Discrimination in Silicon Valley | Entrepreneur](#)

The tech industry's well document bias against women and people of color expands to include everyone past the age of 40 or so.

With oftentimes high salaries at their disposal, most of Silicon Valley's over-50 workforce can appreciate that fine wine gets better with age. And yet, as to their personal job security and marketability, nearly 90 percent of those in this age demographic worry that they will not. This article examines why.

Professionals in most industries -- medicine, law, education -- tend to wear their advanced years and refined skill sets as badges of honor. They, their colleagues and those to whom they give service generally equate age with wisdom, a reason to trust their judgment, grounds to feel safe with their financial affairs, sometimes even their lives. However, recent studies and a

proliferation of age-bias lawsuits demonstrates that the pursuit of youthful exuberance and thinkers uninhibited by what their senior counterparts would tout as "perspective" has dominated hiring and retention decision-making in Silicon Valley for years, propelling it like an aircraft carrier through a vast sea of tech talent, leaving fear, job dissatisfaction and countless older workers in its wake.

Under California's Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) and the federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), workers over the age of 40 are considered a "protected" category. Adverse employment decisions against this class of workers, whether based solely or even substantially on age, is unlawful and carries high potential consequences, including awards of back and future pay and benefits, damages for emotional distress, the recovery of legal fees and costs of suit and, in some situations, the imposition of punitive damages. Although rarer, when brought as class actions, as in the case of oft-suspect Reductions in Force ("RIFs"), the aggregate effect of joining numerous claims together can threaten the solvency of even the biggest tech sector players.

Studies such as ProPublica's analysis of elderly worker cuts at IBM (an estimated 20,000+ persons), ageism complaints against Google, Hewlett-Packard and other tech giants -- even director Shawn Levy's motion picture "The Internship" -- are suggestive of a troubling trend, and yet, are just a few bright points on a very long and spotted line. Indeed, since 2008, over 250 age discrimination charges were filed with California's Department of Fair Employment and Housing against the Valley's 150 largest tech companies, with dozens of those administrative charges advancing to litigation in state and federal courts. Beyond that, hundreds more never made their way into the public eye or court dockets by virtue of severance packages and hush-money paid to thwart lawsuits.

That the leading basis of discrimination in California's tech culture is ageism (e.g., a whopping 28 percent higher than those based upon race) is consistent with this author's experience. That the average tech worker age is five years younger than in most other industries is glaring. That statistic, coupled with this author's own representation of workers in this sector for decades, suggests that ageism, most heavily in Silicon Valley's hiring practices, is alive and well.

But just examining statistics doesn't fully capture the cancerous effects of this form of bias. Sure, the numbers exhibit its prevalence, but its effect on productivity and morale, and the inevitable degeneration of what we might term the Spirit of Innovation is immeasurable. California's claim to tech fame was born out of a willingness to share ideas, a synergy that stretches imaginations, and not just those of a narrow segment of the work population. Messaging that older workers can't contribute to that process or that what they offer won't be well-received, broadcasts a notion that ingenuity has a limited shelf life; that's a stifling message which can make for some pretty boring in-house creative sessions. Sit with that visual for a moment and you can easily imagine

the ripples in terms of employee morale and productivity, the uptick in stress-related claims, even the reluctance by some to pursue careers within an industry seemingly-relegated to the young. The ripples are near-endless, and they're not good.

Viewed in this way, one might even argue that whether age discrimination is thriving in the Valley is secondary to the *perception* that it is. And it is so perceived. According to a 2018 Dice Diversity and Inclusion report, nearly two-thirds of tech workers aged 40-45 worry their age will hurt their continuing career, a number that skyrockets to nearly 90 percent for those over the age of 50. From a pure workforce productivity standpoint, therefore, the effect of this may not immediately be obvious, but is equally damaging, as are all forms of discrimination: workers of all ages want to feel their employment opportunities are merit-based, that hard work pays off.

Their innate sense of justice tells them that ethically-bereft employers don't deserve their workers' best efforts. Countless industrial psychologists have studied this, and the results are consistently what you'd expect: the mere *belief* that bias (e.g., ageism) is an impediment to job security breeds conservatism, a reluctance to "stick one's neck out." That mode of thinking squelches innovation --perhaps in ways not readily calculable, but at a cost that is unquestionably enormous.

So, moving forward, what's the plan? Well, understanding the hidden effects of discrimination is only a start, followed closely by strict enforcement of workplace anti-discrimination policies -- all great bandages, but not terribly effective on a gaping wound. Arguably, a better return on worker investment, and a better insurance policy against litigation for tech employers, is a forced reboot of attitudes, perhaps with reminders that imagination is not synonymous with adolescence.

When sexual harassment lawsuits started appearing on front pages with regularity, nearly every major employer sent their management teams to anti-discrimination seminars and enrolled their offenders in "sensitivity training" programs. Can't more be done to mirror those efforts today to combat ageism and the perceptions that promote it?

And, while tech employers are beefing up these messages of equality vis-a-vis third party educators, shouldn't more be done to facilitate communication between workers of diverse age groups? Silicon Valley is full of business incubators, think tanks and hives, and some are excellent generators of ideas through the use of facilitators and moderators. And some aren't. For those who think this structured approach is a frivolous expense, think again. Teasing out everyone's ideas, no matter what you presume they can offer, is essential to the lively discourse that leads to invention. It's the stuff of which the greatest ideas are made.

And, finally, tech employers would be smart to recognize that the application of experiential knowledge -- the kind only derived through trial and error -- doesn't have to stifle the creative process. It actually serves as an excellent cross check against chasing impractical ideas that can otherwise cost businesses dearly. Sure, enrolling workers in anti-discrimination training, using facilitators to promote full participation, comes at some cost, but so does defending against protracted litigation; that, this author knows all too well. In the end, whether the impetus for embracing wisdom as an asset is forced or not, providing a more receptive audience in Silicon Valley for older workers is bound to yield a great return on investment.

List of links to relevant websites:

<https://www.dice.com/career-advice/ageism-tech-major-problem-survey>

<https://www.theladders.com/career-advice/propublica-new-york-times-older-workers-job-ads-face-book-google-linkedin>

<https://www.greatplacetowork.com/certified-company/7005361>

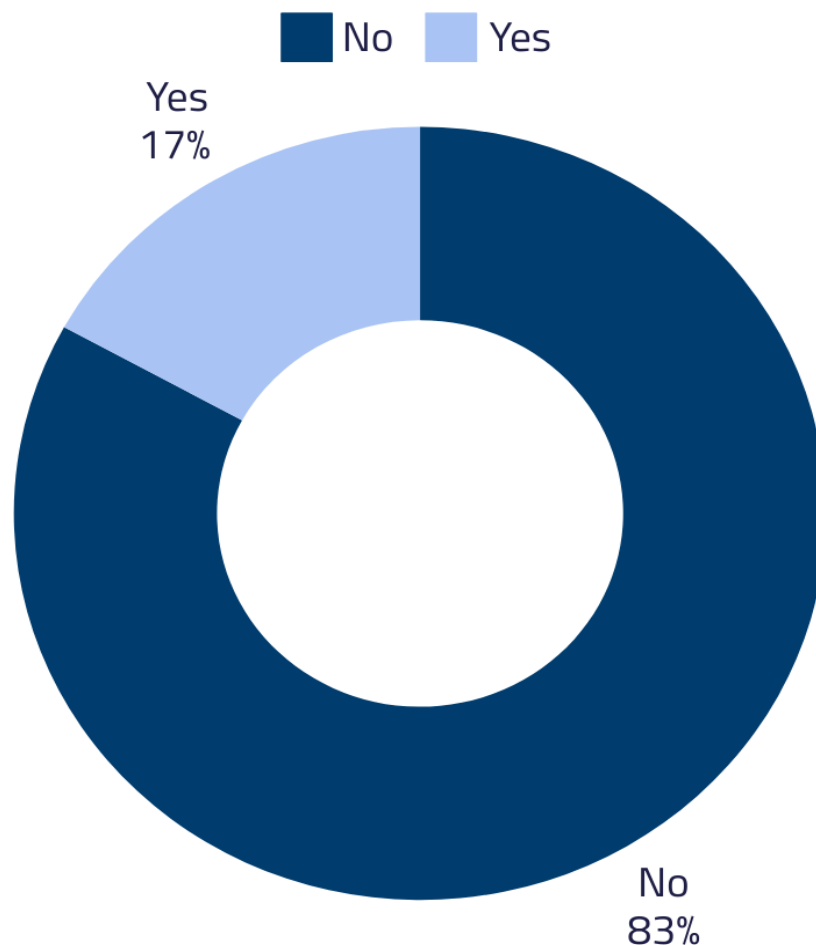
<https://www.cultureamp.com/case-studies/bombas>

<https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/find-a-b-corp/company/bombas/>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2020/08/03/companies-in-their-cost-cutting-are-discriminating-against-older-workers/?sh=4db087e4436a>

Primary Research

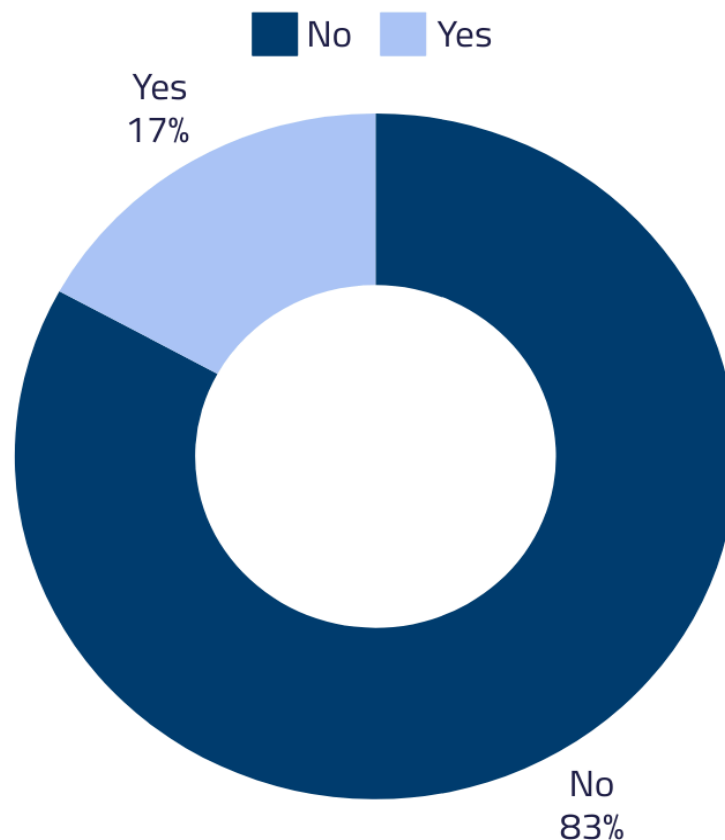
Recognizing the issue of career stagnation among mid-career tech workers is crucial for Bombas as it seeks to attract this talent pool. Below, you can find our research that indicates that 83% of tech workers aged 40-60 are dissatisfied with their current career progression and feel they lacked sufficient opportunities for development in their past positions. By addressing these concerns, Bombas can position itself as an employer that values and invests in the continuous growth of its employees. This not only enhances job satisfaction and retention but also leverages the extensive expertise of seasoned tech professionals, fostering innovation and driving the company forward.



Are you satisfied with your current career progression?

Primary Research

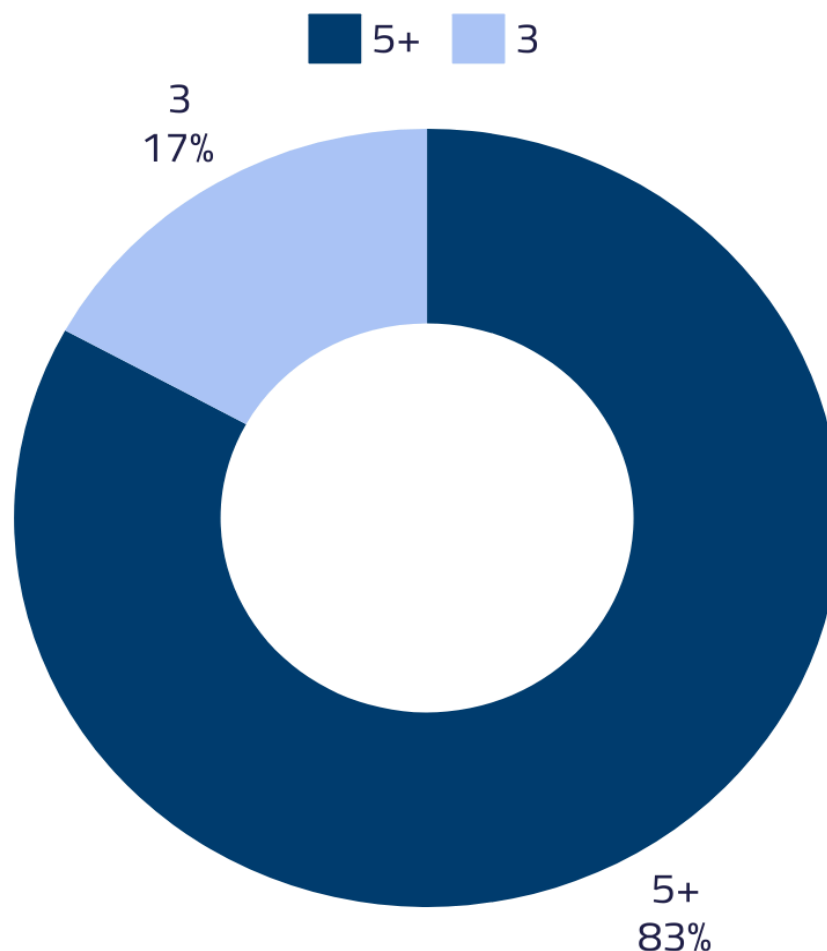
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Do you believe that your previous companies provided adequate opportunities for professional development?

Primary Research

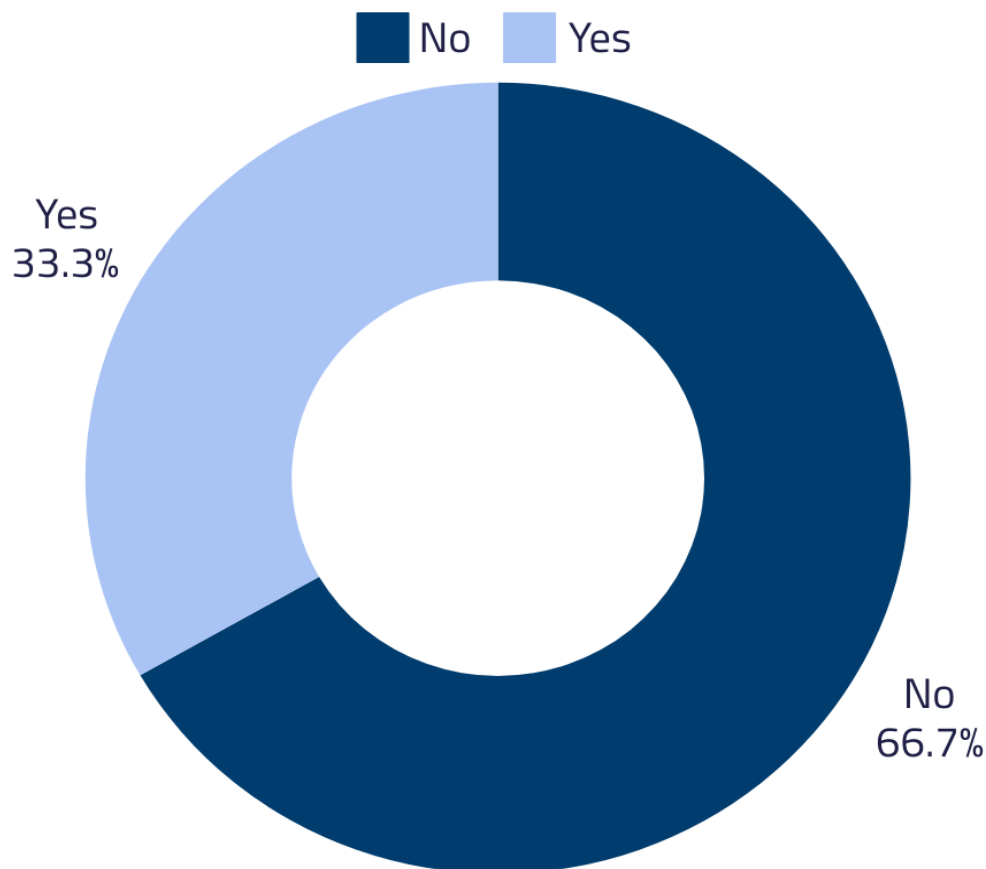
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How many jobs have you had in the tech industry?

Primary Research

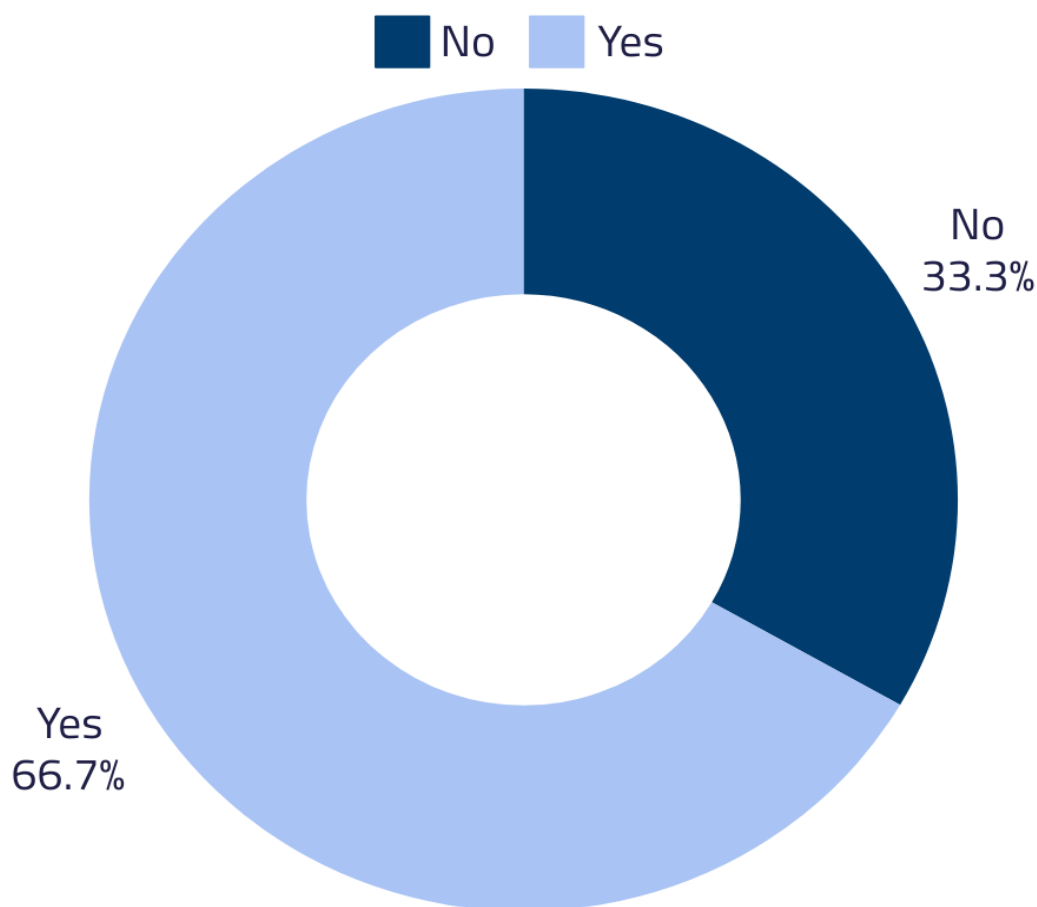
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Do you believe your previous workplace emphasized healthy work-life balance and employee's mental health?

Primary Research

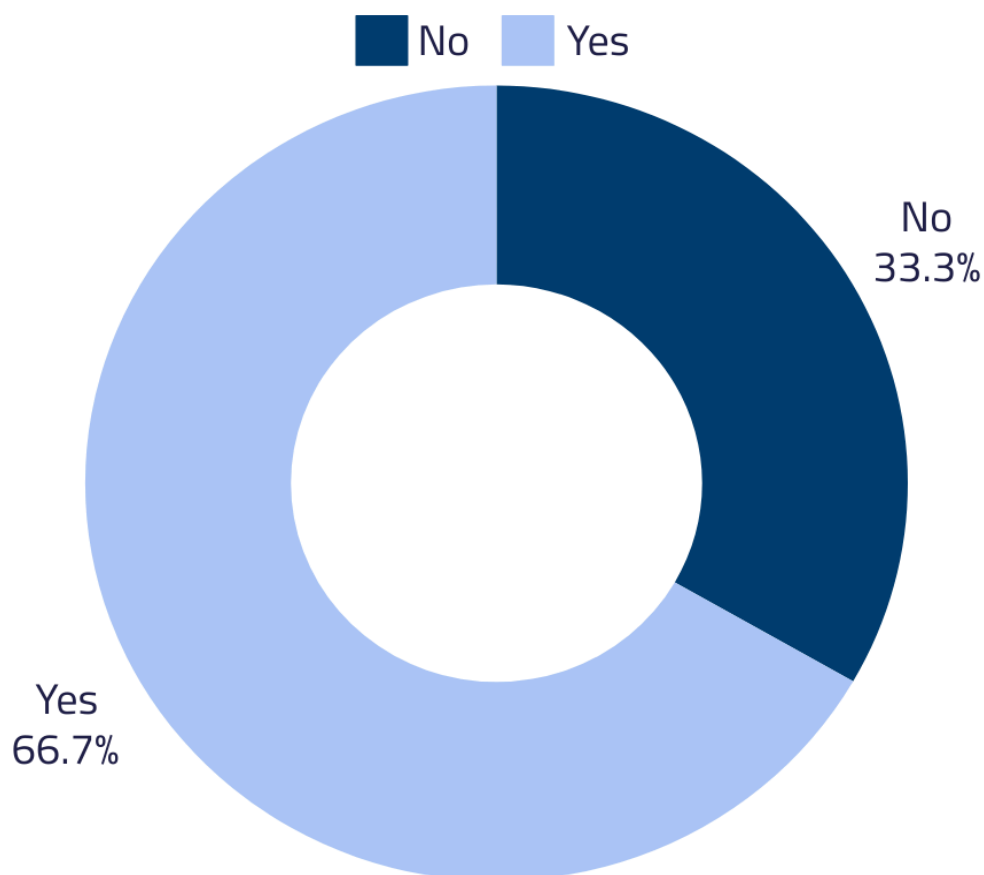
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**Does a company's values affect
your choice in a job?**

Primary Research

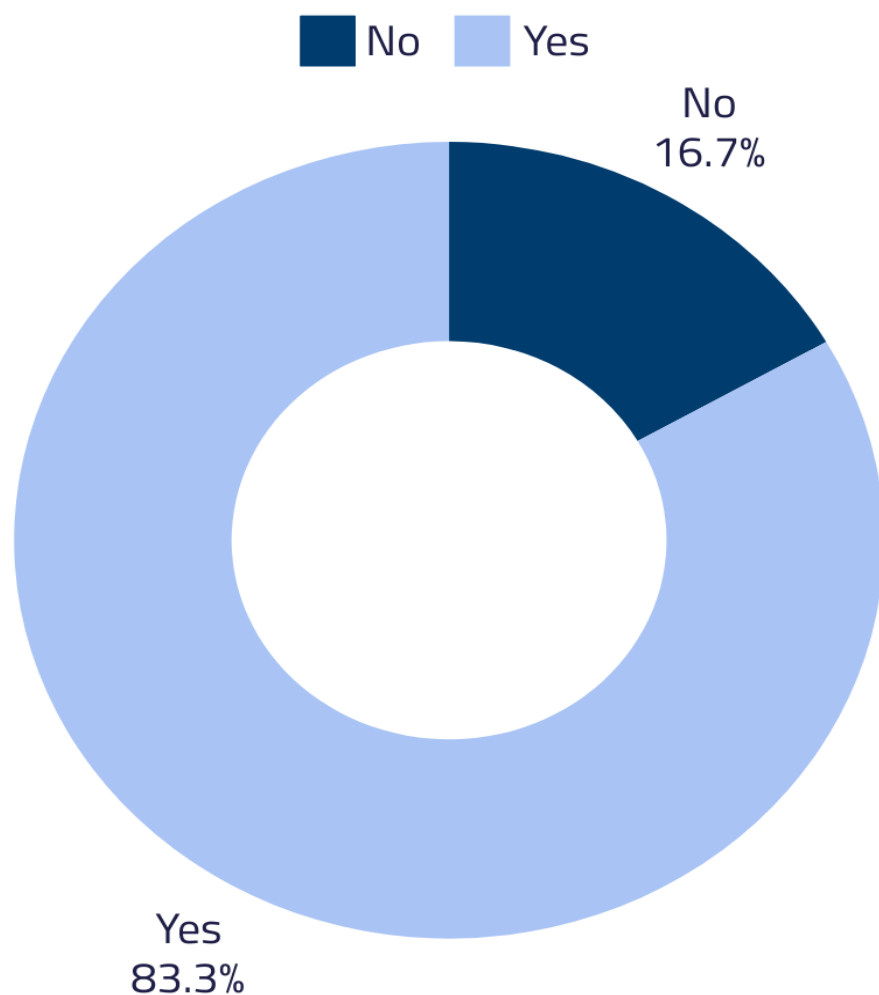
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**Are you still learning more
about computer science today?**

Primary Research

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**Are you okay teaching
newcomers to the tech scene
about your craft?**

Primary Research

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