

WORKPLACE MATTERS

Don't overlook older workers; they've a lot to offer

By 2020, one in four American workers will be older than 55, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This is a 36 percent increase from 2010. As baby boomers age, they continue to do things their own way.



**Robin
Onaclea
Scott**

This will be true in the workplace. More people are working past the traditional retirement age and in the process shattering stereotypes.

Many boomers will stay in the work force beyond age 65 simply because they enjoy working. Some decided to make a career change in their 50s and want to continue in these new jobs. Others are putting off retirement because of money.

According to a recent survey by CareerBuilder, 65 percent of workers age 60 and older said they are putting off retirement because they can't financially afford to retire. About 10 percent say they don't think they'll ever be able to retire.

Myths about mature workers are rampant. These misperceptions can cause businesses to overlook older job applicants and under-use current mature workers. The most common fears are that such workers are tough to train, less reliable and struggle with new technology. In fact, research shows older workers are among the most dependable, engaged and productive employees.

Turnover statistics indicate that a worker older than 55 is likely to stay on the job more than three times longer than 25- to 34-year-old workers. On average, they have higher levels of engagement than younger workers. They also tend to have better basic skills, particularly in math, reading and writing.

The new intergenerational workplace will be unlike any before it, and will require both the employer

and workers to be flexible. Older workers will more actively manage their careers, rather than just ease into retirement. Participation in a multigenerational workplace will challenge all workers, while also providing a business with the opportunity to reap the benefits of various approaches to performing the job.

Depending on leadership, customers and culture, some companies will include more mature workers than others. If your business is one of these, here are some ways you can tap into the strengths of this fast-growing part of the work force:

- ◆ Make training opportunities equally available to employees regardless of age. Since turnover rates tend to be lowest among mature employees, the return on their education can be significant.

- ◆ Promote mixed-age work teams to encourage ongoing "cross-mentoring" with mature workers sharing institutional knowledge and younger ones sharing technological know-how.

- ◆ Acknowledge the expertise of older workers. They have a wealth of experience.

- ◆ Understand that mature workers may have different preferences when it comes to perks, such as flexible hours or working conditions. Offer various options.

Don't let misconceptions about mature workers prevent you from keeping or finding valuable employees. There are advantages to employing a mature worker — advantages that might give your business an edge. And there are advantages to having a diverse work force in which workers build on each other's skills.

If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Onaclea Scott, business service coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at robino@laneworkforce.org or 541-682-7224.