

Member's Quarterly

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President's Message

Engaging the Older Worker

The risk-free relationship pays great dividends

Despite the fears that baby boomers would desert the workplace in droves, many older boomers are continuing to work. Some of them are not being utilized properly and many are being sidelined by their employers. While it is true that some older workers "check out" in the period before their impending retirement, this certainly does not apply to everyone. While there is no normal or mandatory retirement age anymore, this resource can and should be fully utilized.

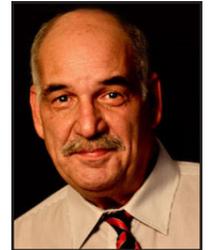
In some ways, older workers are the ideal workers. They know the ropes and where the bodies are buried in the organization. They may have even dug a few holes themselves during their careers. They have little to lose and lots to offer if you want to take advantage of their skills and abilities. The first thing we must do is change our attitudes about older workers as being too old to contribute or learn.

Instead of isolating them in a corner, older workers do best when they are acknowledged and celebrated. It's not showing respect for their age, but their experience. They are great sounding boards for new ideas and to help point out the pitfalls of the past. They can help you learn from your previous mistakes so you and your organization don't repeat them in the future. This is a win-win situation. You keep them engaged and interested and they help you improve your problem solving.

Older workers can also do well as mentors and trainers. They can inspire the rookies and even some of your seasoned veterans. And it's not just war stories or an enhanced corporate history that they can pass along, it's real life experience. Assign them to work alongside a new employee as they learn the ropes and don't be surprised when you find them having coffee together. It's a risk-free relationship that can pay great dividends for both employees and your organization.

Older workers don't need a lot of attention. They are often self-motivated and just need a little nudge to keep them interested and engaged. Appeal to their sense of pride and commitment and they will rise to the challenge. Smart employers are taking advantage of the many attributes that these older workers can still bring to the table. Don't let them coast into retirement — use them before you lose them. They will be happier and so will you.

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