

Member's Quarterly

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Perspective

Oil and Water: Technology and Older Workers

Take the reins and reap the benefits



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The stereotype about aging employees being unable to adapt to change or learn new technologies is a persistent one—and not entirely without merit. That said, I think that most active employees still committed to making an impact through their work have accepted technological advances as part of the package. Naturally, some difficulty may be inevitable, but there are many ways that you can make it easier on yourself. If you find yourself daunted by the introduction of new tech (or need to motivate a colleague who feels that way), here are some suggestions to get you thinking more productively about the whole endeavour and accept that technology is not the enemy.

Successful people never stop learning

Don't you agree? No ambitious person would ever claim to have arrived at a point where they know everything they need to know and have no use for new knowledge or ideas. While most of us have met individuals who claim to know everything about anything and there is nothing you can teach them, we know that these people won't make it to the top in today's workplace. It is the same with technology as with any other aspect of your personal or professional life—you should continually be growing.

If you're the one trying to encourage the adaptation of new technologies, having career path discussions with employees of all tenures can go a long way to showing them the real benefits. It is also wise to offer varied training methods such as online training and mentorship. Everyone learns differently and at their own pace. Mentoring leaves room for more or less formality. It may involve assigning a mutual mentorship between an older and younger employee so they can learn from each other. Why not? Let's make the most of the resources at our disposal.

Never underestimate your people. Everyone must remember that while older employees may not have grown up with new technologies like their younger and so-called digital native colleagues have, they are not totally illiterate in technology use. Make sure that those involved in teaching the new systems learn some basic "Train the Trainer" techniques. There is nothing worse than a seasoned expert with extensive knowledge in a particular area trying to teach a novice by yelling or using a flaring temper to get the message across. Even the less experienced deserve patience and respect.

A good attitude goes a really long way

If, on the other hand, you are a veteran employee not feeling particularly enthusiastic about the technological changes being implemented, remember that this is largely about your attitude and frame of mind. Before getting overwhelmed, note that the desire to learn new skills is an essential attribute for succeeding in every aspect of your life. It might take you a bit longer than the Millennial or Gen Z to grasp new technology, but you can more than make up for this through commitment and a willingness to learn. Also, remember that you don't have to become a total tech genius to do your job well. Instead, focus on a few essential skills that will have immediate consequences for the tasks that lie ahead.

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