

Myths and Realities of the Older Worker



According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics the highest growth rate in the workforce over the next several years will be workers age 55-64. Some perceive these workers to be troublesome, not as productive as younger workers, costing more, or any number of misconceptions.

Let's take a look at a few of the facts.

Cost More: Reality

Older workers typically command higher salaries due to their experience. Thus, from a purely economic view, they cost more.

Some may disagree stating that older workers are more productive because of the experience they bring.

Harder to Train: Myth

Hands-on experiential learning is shown to be the best method to train mature workers. Training this method is more time consuming and is perceived as being harder to train. The reality is that this is the preferred training method for any age group. Companies haven't stepped up to plate to be serious about offering training that actually produces results.

Health Insurance Costs Rise: Reality

Workers age 50-64 on average cost 1.4 to 2.2 times as much in health care costs as workers in their 30s and 40s according to Towers Perrin.

More Time off from Work: Myth

The Bureau of Labor Statistics show that workers under age 54 and over age 54 were absent from work at the same ratio.

Technology Adverse: Myth & Reality

Those in their mid-60s certainly didn't grow up interacting via a computer screen the way the last couple of generations have. Many do not have the mindset to deal with complicated technology issues. On the other hand, workers under 55 caught the wave of the computer revolution and have

been using technology at work for 25 years or more.

Just Waiting for Retirement: Myth

Older workers are more committed to their career according to the Center on Aging and Work at Boston College. It was also noted that HR managers report no significant drop off in productivity as workers age.

Clash with Younger Workers: Myth

We hear that older workers think younger workers are ill-mannered, not dressed appropriately for work, and spend too much time on personal activities. Younger workers think older workers can't use technology and don't appreciate their fresh perspective. Experience shows that the best workplace is a combination of younger and older workers. The mix tends to provide a calm work environment with more respect than a more homogenous work group.

No Interest in Lower Level Jobs: Myth

Ingrained in organizational culture is the thought that no one would take a lower level job, it is all about moving up the corporate ladder. Many older workers express a strong desire to have a position that offers less stress. Management workers may long to have an individual contributor role and put the corporate politics behind them.