

Old is gold

Older workers have a lot to offer employers – if they are given the chance

ONE of the most obvious qualities older employees possess in greater measure than their younger counterparts is experience. And there is no substitute for it.

Mature-age workers, like any other employees, enjoy challenging and rewarding employment, and can be more productive by drawing on their years of experience. They will often achieve the same outcomes as younger workers by working smarter rather than harder.

The path to find work for a mature-age candidate can be long and difficult, so it's also important for employers to recognise perseverance, persistence and resilience as characteristics worth embracing by employees in their organisation.

Employers also need to maintain relationships with people who will not only be leaving their organisation, but who have left in the past.

Former employees can be hired back on a part-time, short-term or project-specific basis. One of the most important things an organisation can do is to make these options known.

Alumni programmes and social networking are a good way of putting this into practice. Reaching someone who knows the business well, when you really need them, can be of immense value.

But it's not a one-way street. On the worker-side, mature-age people may need to consider retraining. While some may have moved into managerial positions in the course of their career, and

may prefer to return to a more hands-on role, they may need to brush up on essential skills.

A short technical training course may be all that's required for professionals. Of course, for proactive employers, offering these courses may be a very effective way to attract mature-age workers to their organisation, by removing cost as a barrier to re-entering employment.

The way things are done won't change overnight, but individual organisations that make themselves attractive to mature-age workers stand to gain a competitive advantage.

Mature-age workers have challenges of their own, but as employers wake up and start competing for their talents, the only barrier to making the most of a country's ageing workforce will be the limitations employers impose on themselves.

Making it work

- Be open to employing mature-age workers. Work with Human Resource and your recruitment partner to find the most effective work structure for mature age workers in the organisation. Work-life balance is essential, so the key is to be flexible.

- Realise the benefits. Understand the value that mature-age workers will bring to your business, with their depth of skills and wealth of experience. It may be more cost-effective to hire a mature-age worker on a part-time basis who can "hit the ground running", than employ a junior person full-time who requires a lot of training, super-



Many mature-age workers would consider taking on a new job opportunity, by applying their skills in a new way. - AFPpic

vision and "hand-holding".

Weigh up what you need, make the decision accordingly, particularly if you want to achieve a return on investment as quickly as possible. Mature-age workers often achieve the same outcomes as younger workers by working smarter rather than harder.

- Be creative. Many mature-age workers would consider taking on a new job opportunity or a new role, by applying their skills and experience in a new way. This can be of great benefit to your business and very rewarding for the employee. For example, if you work for a small business, consider employing a mature-age accountant with a background working for large corporations (even if it is only for a short-term basis).

This person would have a vast amount of experience and could provide you with valuable business advice. The key is to be open-minded.

- Focus on retention. Once employed, you need to get serious about retaining mature-age employees. Find out what is important to each individual and work hard to meet those needs as the benefits will pay off for your business.

- Provide further training. Mature-age workers often need to brush up on essential skills, particularly with regard to technology, systems and processes. Offering training and development relevant to their needs and encouraging their participation will result in a happier, more engaged and productive workforce.

- Communication. Critical to an organisation's success to attract and retain mature age workers is to ensure there is ongoing, tailored communication throughout the employment cycle. You may need to communicate flexible working options so that they are well known throughout the organisation. Communicate the

various job opportunities, training and development programmes available to mature age workers.

Communicate news and highly relevant information as part of your retention strategy. By communicating regularly and at various levels, with messages targeted at mature-age workers when appropriate, you can achieve loyalty and longer tenure.

- Maintain contact. Maintain relationships with mature-age people when they leave the business. They may have left their job for another opportunity or a change of environment, but may later be willing to consider a return to the security and rewards of a familiar role, and employers can benefit from their knowledge. - Source: Singapore Straits Times/Asia News Network

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