

# The Aging Workforce Meeting Kit

## What's At Stake

### THE AGING WORKFORCE

Baby Boomers are growing older, and our workforce is graying with them. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the proportion of "older" workers (over age 55) will increase steadily from 12 percent in 2000 to 20 percent by 2025. The physical changes associated with aging could affect workers and their safety on the job. Employers and employees should prepare for the aging workforce now to ensure that job tasks and worksites remain safe.

## What's the Danger

### AGING WORKFORCE CHALLENGES AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

There is a wide range of challenges for when it comes to the aging workforce.

1. **Bias.** A big one to start with. Older workers are less flexible, less motivated, too slow, they take more sick days, etc. These are just a few of the many stereotypes people – older workers included – have about senior workers. As such, bias is one of the toughest aging workforce challenges.
2. **Absenteeism.** Bias or not, absenteeism is an aging workforce trend. Whether it is because their health isn't as good as it once used to be or because they have indeed lost their motivation doesn't matter, it still costs the company money. But before jumping to conclusions about the reasons for the higher absenteeism rates among your older employees, try to find out the real reason. **How?**
3. **Postpone retirement.** When it comes to your aging workforce, you want to keep your top talent too. After all, they are the ones who will have to (co) train the younger employees

to make sure they've got what it takes when eventually retirement does come.

4. **Succession.** You want to choose wisely who you ask to postpone their retirement. One of the most important tasks – and perhaps a future trend – of the aging workforce is to transfer their knowledge and experience to their younger colleagues. So this is yet another thing to think about because even if they've delayed their retirement (for now) time is still ticking for your older workers.
5. **Attract & retain younger employees.** In the end, this is where it all starts. No matter how long your older workers stay or how much you reduce your absenteeism, eventually they will retire. Which means you'll need to have a new generation ready to take off where their predecessors left off.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

### OVERCOMING CHALLENGES OF AN AGING WORKFORCE

- **Keep them interested.** If you help your older employees continue to move their career forward and foster a passion for your business, they will be more motivated to learn new tasks and stay on top of the latest industry trends.
- **Make sure they're in the tech-know.** It's very important for both you and your employees, old and new, to keep up with the most up-to-date advances. If you invest in training and professional development programs to keep your staff tech-savvy, both you and your workforce will benefit greatly.
- **Get the most out of their experience.** Smaller companies are always looking to leverage "big company" expertise and many older workers have spent the bulk of their careers at big companies. Take advantage of their experience.

### AGING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

Show support for an aging workforce with solutions.

1. **Align Tasks & Abilities.** Micromanaging activities often creates a repressive, or stressful, work environment

regardless of age. However, aging workforces typically have a harder time accepting this. (After a lifetime of employment and experiences, many find it insulting to have a manager “babysitting” their efforts.) Not only can they set their own pace and still meet requirements, but they can take breaks as needed to ensure continued alertness, focus, and interest in their tasking.

2. **Prioritize Flexibility.** While your benefits package may be competitive, workers tend to favor flexibility. For example, allowing workers to have a say in their scheduling, working conditions, and tasking can show your employee that their input matters. This is particularly true with an aging workforce.
3. **Create Ergonomically Friendly Environments.** Ergonomically friendly tools, workstations, seating, and other items can help your entire workforce. Not only does this help to reduce the strain on aging’ joints and muscles, it also helps prevent future issues for your younger employees as well.
4. **Invest in Adequate Training.** Technologies are ever evolving. Some of your aging workforce may struggle with this. It is important that you invest in training that helps these individuals adapt to these newer technologies without belittling their intelligence. Furthermore, investing in your own training can help enhance the effectiveness of your management practices when dealing with a workforce that spans several generations.
5. **Be Proactive.** Reasonable accommodations can help older employees who have suffered an injury or illness return to work more quickly. Furthermore, investing in programs that promote health or lifestyle solutions can benefit an aging workforce in their overall wellness and job satisfaction.
6. **Encourage Breaks.** Prolonged sedentary work can cause problems for employees of every age, but it is especially detrimental for older personnel. Workers should be able to take breaks as needed; encourage employees to take a walk or stretch their legs every hour. If you have the ability, providing avenues for low-cost community options can

encourage healthy activities even outside of work.

## **AGING EMPLOYEE TAKEAWAY – EXPERIENCE**

- Early retirees are a wealth of information and knowledge that is relevant for today's market.
- Many older workers have spent a bulk of their careers at big companies. Tap into this "big company" expertise and knowledge.
- These seasoned veterans can usually jump into a position without a need for intensive training.

## **FINAL WORD**

Employers should always try to fit the job task and tools to the individual for maximum safety and this is especially important for older workers. If there are job tasks that they cannot safely do anymore, they need to communicate with their supervisor and consider job accommodations to protect themselves and their coworkers.