

Resource opportunity in a world with not enough people

Some people are old at 30, some forever young. Open your mind to the opportunity of recruiting the over 50 age group and in return you may get a lot more than you had hoped for.

“Inside every old person is a young person wondering what happened.”

- Terry Pratchett, English Author

There is a large pool of willing, experienced workers available to employers - the over 50s - who often find themselves knocked back from job opportunities due to their age.

There are perceptions that older workers can be inflexible, harder to train, won't fit in with younger teams etc. There is no doubt some people may fit into that category but they wouldn't necessarily be 50+. Apply a structured and measured recruitment process to any group and some people will be a great fit, 50+ included.

Think about the age balance of your team. A focus on recruiting youth at the expense of experience could create an imbalance and reduce training and knowledge sharing opportunities.

It's not ideal to build a team of 25-35 year-olds on the assumption that they will fit together. Fit is usually a result of common values, capability and shared goals. A broader range of experience and wisdom that mature workers bring to the workplace will open up new opportunities for others to learn and often supports increased stability, lower staff turnover, and reduced error rates.

A global skill shortage is well under way, with some industries experiencing increasing issues. Demographics are changing and the 50+ 'baby boomers' have become a larger proportion of workforce.

Benefits of older workers can include:

- Work experience – broad, generic, and transferable skills.
- Specific, well-honed skills.
- Real experience over longer periods of time provides insights and risk management lessons.
- Strong work ethic.

- Life experience and social skills – ability to get on with customers, and respond to the unpredictable.
- Motivation and appreciation to be in the workforce.
- Commitment and reliability – short term absence is lower in this age group.
- Any loss in speed and agility is often compensated by increased accuracy and reliability.
- Loyalty – less likely to leave for another job unless conditions are poor.
- Respect for co-workers.
- Evidence that creativity and wisdom increases with age, eg, Picasso, Frank Lloyd Wright.

In one case study in the UK, retailers B&Q opened a retail store in Macclesfield, staffed entirely by over 50s. Compared to other B&Q stores, statistics were as follows:

• Profits 18% higher	• 59% less 'shrinkage' (theft, breakages etc.)
• Customer perception of service improved	• Staff turnover 6 times lower
• Skill base of the workforce increased	• 39% less short-term absenteeism

Ideas on making the most of opportunities with older workers

1. Preventing discrimination: following the law at the most basic level, this requires organisations to ensure that none of their policies and practices either directly or indirectly discriminate against older workers. Although few organisations deliberately discriminate, some practices can unintentionally discriminate; for example, there may not be a policy that says that older workers can't access training, but managers' attitudes and practices may result in only younger workers getting the opportunity.
2. Ensuring the full contribution of your current workforce: going beyond a one-size-fits-all approach, creating an environment that values the experience and contribution of older workers and encourages them to participate. It may mean considering the way that

3. work is organised or jobs are designed, or other considerations that take account of older workers' work-life balance objectives. The focus is on equal opportunities for employees, not necessarily treating everyone the same way.
4. Capitalising on opportunities: the most proactive level, where organisations deliberately decide to improve their recruitment and retention of older workers and maximise the way they can add value. Some of the features are:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive recruitment processes: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matching the worker group to your customer demographic (market niche, e.g., child care or aged care nursing or retail niche).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies include mechanisms that older workers are more likely to respond to: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retaining an older, more valued skill set in a 'lost art' or technology.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phased retirement programmes: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow flexibility with hours and to move from full- to part-time, try consulting or contracting arrangements and, once retired, project based or called back to cover in a time of need.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge transfer processes: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddy the older workers up with younger, less experienced workers for knowledge transfer.

Sources

Valuing Experience: A Practical Guide to Recruiting and Retaining Older Workers – EEO Trust
Older Workers: Employers Speak Out.