

## Engaged Older Employees How They Can Help Meet Your Workforce Needs

By Nancy S. Ahlrichs, SPHR



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**H**ow valuable are experienced employees in some organizations?

To keep knowledge in-house, southern Wisconsin health care provider FHN set up a phased retirement program to enable retiring employees to work as little as three shifts per pay period. New Jersey's Atlantic Health System created the "1,000 Hour (per year) Club" and invited retirees back for per diem, part-time and special assignment projects that do not interfere with their retirement benefits. At Days Inn and Knights Inn, approximately 10% of its 900-employee reservation departments is its own retired employees. They act as role models and mentor new hires in the call centers.

Each of these employers has found that flexibility enhances the engagement and delays the total retirement of some of the best, most productive employees. Research says that engaged employees of any age plan to be with an employer for at least two years, decline interviews, accept job description changes, training and promotions, and are willing to "go the extra mile."

However, job seekers past age 40 often fall prey to myths, including, "He wouldn't be interested. The job requires relocation," or "She is too old for the job," "He hasn't had an original idea for the past 20 years," and "It's too hard to teach an old dog new tricks." Research tells us that these myths are just that: myths. Nevertheless, these falsities guide the hiring and internal promotions in too many organizations.

At a time when employers have more qualified job seekers of all ages from which to choose, there are many reasons that successful organizations are turning to seasoned job candidates as well as retirees to fill current openings:

- Seasoned employees have deep and broad knowledge, due to years of experience. These employees understand that the customer comes first. If put into a new situation, their good manners and "street savvy" from years on the job will guide them to uncover an issue and suggest a solution.
- Experienced employees often want to mentor. Smart employers add mentoring to those job descriptions. For maximum benefit, pair a Baby Boomer or Veteran generation employee with a Gen Xer or a Millennial to mentor each other.
- Longtime employees tend to be loyal, punctual and available for overtime. According to an Accenture study, 39% are willing to work long hours – car keys will not be in the

ignition at 5:01 p.m.

- Baby Boomers and Veterans can be productive and are not discouraged in spite of new, weak or incompetent managers. In fact, those employees brag about how much they can do in spite of their managers. Duty motivates Veterans and competition motivates Baby Boomers.
- Employees over age 40 are just like their younger counterparts: They want to learn new skills. According to research, even among employees within five years of retirement, 88% are willing to acquire new skills.
- Mature employees want new challenges, and yes, different jobs. Of this group, 46% of near-retirement employees would even relocate for their employer.
- Senior employees don't panic in tough times. They have seen it all, survived and thrived. Those who lived through the Depression, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, inflation, stagflation and the Tech Bust understand that the economy ebbs and flows. They also know that their individual creativity, tenacity and productivity will be one of the keys to the long-term success of their organization. Contributing to an employer's success makes them proud.

In the next three to five years – as we continue the uphill trek to a more stable economy – our organizations need the energy, knowledge, willingness to learn and results in the face of imperfect management that seasoned employees can offer. The majority of Baby Boomers and Veterans are hard-wired to be engaged. Healthy, successful organizations have a mix of at least four generations in their employee populations. As employers review qualified candidates, they would do well to give mature candidates a second look.

### INFORMATION LINK

**Author:** Nancy S. Ahlrichs, SPHR is the vice president of talent management and diversity for United Way of Central Indiana. She can be contacted at (317) 921-1255 or [www.uwci.org](http://www.uwci.org). She is also the author of *Igniting Gen B and Gen V: The New Rules of Engagement for Boomers, Veterans and Other Long-termers on the Job*. The book is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

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