



Diversity! in the workplace

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Assessing the Hidden Assets in Older Workers

“They’ll probably think I’d need a nap or something,” growled the 55-year plus job seeker sitting in front of me. “How do I convince a new employer that I still have ideas and energy to contribute, and my skills are actually pretty good?”

As a career coach, I can usually count on hearing older job seekers rail against the ageism bias they are certain awaits them. In many cases, they are convinced that is why they were dismissed from their previous job, so they expect nothing less moving forward.

Yes, there are pros and cons to hiring mature workers and they will be front-and-centre on more company agendas as the demographics start to swing more dramatically toward an aging population.

When considering older workers, key guidelines like these below can be useful in making the right decisions.

Are they computer savvy?

Some older workers are quite proud of their computer abilities and that can translate to enhanced productivity for your company. On the other hand, don’t assume that they have what might be deemed ‘the basics’ in a younger worker – and if they don’t, does it really matter for the work you are hiring them to do?

Are they self-aware?

You don’t want to hire someone set in their ways, and in the ways business was done at their previous companies. They may have difficulty integrating with your systems and processes. Do you see them as quick learners who are self-correcting? Will they be employees who are open and responsive to feedback? Interview to find out.

Are they flexible and adaptable to change?

Older workers have seen the workplace go through dramatic change. Some may have ‘change fatigue’; others may find change invigorating. How would you assess this person’s ability to manage the spectrum of change in your company? Ultimately, you want them to take pride in rising to new expectations so they become low maintenance, high-value employees.

What new qualities will they bring to the existing team?

Reliability, work ethic, respect for authority, attendance, (and dare I say, loyalty) are some of the founding attributes of this generation of workers. On a 'best-fit' team the right older person can also act as a sounding board, resource person and mentor. In an ideal scenario past experience may enable them to become an informal right hand to an overscheduled manager.

Of course, the onus is not all on the company when it comes to hiring older workers. That 55+ job seeker is now hard at work upgrading his marketing points and presentations skills. His challenge is to articulate his value, especially on the points above, and to build enough momentum in his search to secure an offer. Landing that first offer will be good news especially since today's older workers are paving the way for the rest of us!

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