

Older workforce requires variety of recruitment strategies

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Employers globally are facing challenges and needs posed by baby-boom generation employees. A new Penn State study of 208 U.S. employers found a wide range of strategies used to recruit and retain older workers, rather than a single approach.

"Today's employers will need to be innovative in hiring and motivating their workforce employees who can vary widely in age from Generation X and Y to Baby Boomers," said researchers Diane Spokus, a recent Ph.D. recipient in workforce education, and William Rothwell, professor of workforce education and training and development. "Few institutions have retention efforts under way to retain their mature workforce. But managers will need a smorgasbord approach to fully use the untapped assets of an aging workforce."

Since fewer younger people will be available to fill entry-level jobs due to lower birth rates in the late 1960s and 1970s, the older workers, with their experience and knowledge, may be ideally suited to fill the critical workforce areas in all industry, according to the researchers. Some baby boomers will continue to work because they can't afford to retire, but others will stay on because they want to pursue meaningful activities.

In a study of 208 employers, Rothwell and Spokus identified best practices that were reportedly being used in recruitment, training, and management of older workers by companies in the United States. This study was a cross-sectional online survey conducted in cooperation with the American Management Association (AMA) and the Human

Resource Institute (HRI). AMA is a global, not-for-profit, membership-based association that provides a full range of management development and educational services to individuals, companies, and government agencies worldwide.

The study is published in a new book "Working Longer: New Strategies for Managing, Training and Retaining Older Workers" Chapter topics range from adapting the workplace to accommodate physiological changes, training and instructional design for older workers, managing organizational knowledge, to what employers can do to plan for an aging workforce. The purpose of the book is to guide employers and trainers on how to optimize the talents of the incumbent aging workforce.

The responses indicate that 49 percent of employers use employee incentives for referrals to recruit older workers; 57.7 percent use flex time work schedules as incentives to hire and retain older workers; 58.6 percent of older workers are flexible and open to change; and 31.9 percent invite retirees and semi-retirees to holiday events and get-togethers to maintain personal and professional ties.

Employers in the survey felt that some management practices are particularly important to managing older workers and creating a work environment friendly to them. These practices could include extended lunch breaks and flexible workdays. Sponsoring health fairs was also named as a desirable practice. The authors revealed practices that older workers can sometimes be best trained together and that training can be designed to connect to previous work experience.

Employers in the survey indicated that offering employees incentives for referrals and using newspaper advertisements were particularly good practices in recruiting older workers. Of lesser value were other common recruiting options, such as online ads on the web that have grown popular with the advent of e-recruiting.

In contrast, individuals participating in the authors' survey of older workers indicated that they were attracted to employers most by positive referrals coming from friends or colleagues. Challenging work is the thing that older workers want most, says the study.

Source: Penn State

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