



TOO OLD FOR THE JOB? NO WAY!

Older workers are needed

By 2020 one in four of New Zealand labour force is expected to be older than 55 years of age. At the same time, demand for skilled labour is growing. This means older people will be an increasingly important and valuable part of our workforce.

Older workers are assets to a workplace

Older workers can bring many gains to the workplace, such as:

- A strong work ethic
- Fewer workplace accidents
- More stability in work teams
- Customer service that reflects their experience
- Less short term sick leave
- Retention of skills and knowledge

Getting the best from older workers requires consideration of their needs, aspirations and expectations.

Adapting workplaces

As the age profile of workplaces changes, providing a safe, healthy and stimulating work environment for older workers is becoming more important for businesses. Employers should consider three key aspects:

- flexibility in employment arrangements – like providing scheduling choices to allow for part-time work, catering for caring responsibilities or avoiding night work
- suitable ergonomics – such as good lighting, control of noise, and minimizing or eliminating heavy lifting
- upskilling opportunities – make sure that all workers, regardless of age, have access to staff development and training

Myths about older workers

Although many employers appreciate having older members in their teams, negative and wrong stereotypes about older workers persist. Here are a few:

Myth 1: Older workers can't or won't learn new skills.

Reality While older workers sometimes take longer to absorb completely new material, their better study habits and accumulated experience actually lower training costs. Training that is tailored to people's learning styles can be particularly beneficial.

Myth 2: Older workers are not flexible or adaptable.

Reality Older workers are just as adaptable but they are more likely to ask why changes are being brought in.

Myth 3: Older workers have more accidents.

Reality This is not supported by the evidence. Older workers work smarter, take fewer risks and have lower accident rates than many other groups.

Myth 4: Older workers are less productive.

Reality Productivity is not a function of age. In fact, mature workers produce high quality work which can result in significant cost savings for employers. Stories abound of highly committed older workers preventing costly mistakes.

Myth 5: Older workers take more sick days than younger workers.

Reality Attendance records are actually better for older workers. Any significant increase in hospital stays or sick leave is not likely to show up until people are aged over 80.

Myth 6: Older workers are more expensive.

Reality Older workers tend to stay in a job longer than younger workers. Subsequently, less needs to be spent on their recruitment, hiring, and training in generic skills.

Myth 7: Older workers lack strength and stamina.

Reality This is a stereotype. Many older workers have excellent strength and stamina – sometimes better than younger workers. Often, declining strength can be compensated for by exercise. Appropriate use of equipment can also minimize physical limitations – and not just for older workers.

For further information and useful contacts

Department of Labour

www.dol.govt.nz/services/LMI/workforce2020/ageing-and-demographic-changes.asp

NEON (Equal Opportunities Trust)

www.neon.org.nz

