

BENEFITS OF HIRING OLDER WORKERS

$$\frac{H = A(2) + V}{F}$$

Resources for Seniors, Inc. is the lead aging agency in Wake County. We were established in 1973 and last year serviced 27,322 older adults and their caregivers a total of 673,652 times. I am privileged to serve as President / CEO of the agency.

On May 20, 1985, I reported to work for the first day of my current position and the first person I talked to was the 78 year old Human Resources Assistant. After being processed in, she walked me down to my new office and introduced me to my 73 year old secretary. Odd I thought, “ Is anyone work here my age. “

Well of course I found plenty of employees my age or younger, many of which are still there today. Now, 23 years later, at age 60, I am an older worker and we continue to value the older worker at Resources for Seniors, Inc. and with a work force of 131.

- 41 % are considered older workers over the age of 50.
- 33% are over 55,
- 17% over 60,
- 11% over 65,
- 5% over 70,
- 1.5% over 80. Our oldest employee is 87 and is an Exercise Leader at one of our senior centers.

During my tenure at RFS I have made some observations of the benefits of hiring and retaining the older adult. Now I am one of that group. These observations are in no means in any particular order of value. Older workers real value comes from experience. And from my experience as an older worker observing older workers at Resources for Seniors, Inc., I offer these comments on the benefits and values of hiring and retaining older workers. They can be summarized through the formula: $\frac{H = A(2) + V}{F}$

- From this employer’s standpoint the older workers are appealing – because:
- they want to work, preferring to stay active and engaged;
 - they can fill temporary, seasonal, or part-time jobs;
 - they fill full time jobs;
 - they can be flexible regarding work hours and locations;
 - they have a strong desire to apply their knowledge and skill to benefit our mission;
 - they strengthen diversity in our workplace;
 - and generally their behavior serves as a role model for other employees.

HOW DO YOU CREATE AN AGE-FRIENDLY WORKFORCE?

$$\frac{H = A(2) + V}{F}$$

I would rather call it family friendly because the culture that we have created at RFS is that of a family. Employees with children, parents and grandparents - Employees as caregivers at all levels. The culture is create at the Board level and passed through the agency with our core values:

- Innovation and Creativity
- Professionalism
- Service Excellence
- Compassion
- Integrity
- Community – RFS employees are members of the community that we serve. We are committed to working for and with our fellow citizens to make Wake County a compassionate place to live at all stages of life.

So to not have an age friendly workplace would be contradictory to our business values. So for us it just comes naturally. You have to know, understand, and appreciate the values that the older worker brings to the table. To me that is the key to “HOW”. Accept them and add flexibility to that and you have a winning situation. Flexibility is the key work in recruitment, training, work scheduling, and on and on. At RFS we show our appreciation that:

Dedicated older workers produce higher quality work, which results in a significant cost savings. Highly committed older workers often find costly mistakes. They tend to be excellent spellers.

Punctuality. Most older workers look forward to going to work each day, so they are likely to arrive on time and be ready to work, preventing gaps in coverage and potentially the needs to pay overtime. Most older workers wear watches. Imagine that. They also have lower absentee and turnover rates than younger employees.

Honesty is common among older workers, whose values as a group includes personal integrity and a devotion to the truth.

Detail-oriented, focused and attentive older workers add an intangible value that rubs off on all employees and save us a considerable amount of money on an annual basis.

Good listeners make great employees because they are easier to train. Older employees usually only have to be told once what to do.

Pride in a job well done has become an increasingly rare commodity among younger employees. They want to put their time in and leave, while older workers are more willing to stay later to get a job done because of their pride in the final product. They

generally have a strong work ethic and they generally find satisfaction with and enjoy work.

Organizational skills among older workers mean employers who hire them are less likely to be a part of this startling statistic I found in Entrepreneur Magazine – “*More than a million man hours a year are lost to workplace disorganization.*” My older workers tend to see and understand the big picture, helping our management make decisions that best meet our needs.

Efficiency and the confidence to share their recommendations make the older workers ideal employees. Their years of experience in the workplace give them a better understanding of how things might be done more efficiently. “Believe me” they won’t hesitate sharing their ideas with management. I like that.

Maturity comes from years of life and work experiences and makes for workers who get less rattled when problems occur. They are often able to transfer their knowledge and life lessons to other workers and enhance the level of maturity in our work force.

Setting an example for other employees is an intangible value I appreciate. Older workers make excellent mentors and role models guiding younger or inexperienced workers, which makes training other employees less difficult.

Communication skills – knowing when and how to communicate – evolves through years of experience. Older workers understand workplace politics and know how to diplomatically convey their ideas.

Reduced labor costs are a huge benefit when hiring older workers. Many already have insurance plans from prior employers or have an additional source of income and are willing to take a little less to get the job they want and remain engaged. They understand that working for a company is more than just collecting a paycheck. We on the other hand understand this and work with them on flexible hours and schedules if necessary.

Experience – Older workers know the inside-outs of what it is like to work for years on end. From weathering different owners, bosses, and supervisors to dips in economic cycles, different management trends and styles, their wider sphere of knowledge alone means we do not have to spend as much money and time training them.

Work Ethics – I find most 50 plus workers at our agency to be more dependable and determined and usually remain task-focused. These traits are a good example for younger workers.

Customer Servicing – Older workers have proven to be more mature emotionally and can also relate to our clients better. They recognize the importance of customer service. Verbal communication along with a whole host of other skills increase with age.

Loyalty – Unlike their younger co-workers, older workers are less likely to change jobs or job-hop. And it is common knowledge that the lesser the turnover the more money is saved.

Motivation – Older workers are often the most motivated of all workers. This is a very positive influence on service quality that can be documented on our Annual Client Service Survey results.

At Resources for Seniors, our older workers who deal directly with our clients and /or caregivers offer a valued added feature. Most, if not all, know first hand about being either a current or past caregiver to their parents or even their spouse. They are able to apply a special compassion and understanding of our client’s situation. *It is as if they can answer the questions before they are asked.*

They are able navigate the client and caregiver through the vast maze of service options available in Wake County. You see, for the first time in American history, the average married couple has more parents alive than children. And also for the first time, women in America will spend more time caring for a dependent parent than a dependent child. The typical caregiver in today’s society is the female spouse or daughter of an elderly person. Most often she is married, 50-60 years of age and is employed outside the home. The very profile of a growing number of Resources for Seniors’ employees.

To me, all of the values of hiring and maintaining older workers are important, but at Resources for Seniors, perhaps the most important value is the special high quality - interaction that they can have with those we serve.

So to me the formula for an age friendly workplace is:
$$\frac{H = A(2) + V}{F}$$

HOW =
$$\frac{\text{ACCEPTANCE X APPRECIATION + VALUES}}{\div \text{FLEXIBILITY}}$$

Just some general observations from an older worker about older workers. Thank you for including me in your Forum this week.