

Aging Workforce (MWBE Entrepreneurs) and adapting to change

Change comes in different forms and shapes. At a workplace, this change might be in the form of people getting old. When your workforce is getting older, there is of course a need for them to move ahead and make way for the new and young. But is this justified? Older people are the ones who might have spent years and years with an organization. Not only have they given a lot to the organization but they also have a lot to give away to those who are going to replace them.

What motivates older people to work longer?

Studies have shown that older workers are more dedicated to their job than younger people. And that their experience, skills and maturity far outweighs potential problems associated with older people such as illness etc.

Of course, ageing people will chose to continue working if they feel they still have something to contribute to the business. There are other reasons as well. Healthier, longer lives, changes in retirement legislation, and reducing pension values are some of these.

Does discrimination due to age exist?

In a survey conducted by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), 55 percent of the respondents said they had "experienced disadvantage at some point in their career because of their age". It interviewed both young and old people. The results showed that only "twenty-eight percent felt that they had been discriminated against as a result of being perceived as too young and 40 percent felt they had experienced disadvantage as a result of appearing too old". The survey concluded that older people were more discriminated against.

Age diversity in organizations

During the same study being conducted by the CMI, respondents were asked to characterize the age composition of their company. 59 percent described their organization as age diverse, 32 percent described it as mature, while only nine percent described their company's workforce as mostly young. Some of the other conclusions made by this study were that these answers of the respondents mainly described private organizations. Smaller organizations, especially MWBEs with a workforce of less than 50 people were the most likely to characterize their workforce as mature – 42 percent describing it as mature.

If there is less bias as to age during recruitment, it is more likely that the workforce is diverse and no one particular age-group is discriminated against. Managers need to review recruitment practices by testing the level of age awareness amongst those responsible for recruiting staff.

Attitudes to older workers

Over the years, there has been a considerable change in manager's attitudes towards older workers. Today, they see them as valuable assets to the company who possess vital skills, knowledge and the maturity that comes with experience and age. There has been a shift away from the negative stereotype attached to older workers of being totally useless and redundant.

93 percent of the people agree that older people are an important resource for the organization. They also agree to their superior skills and greater knowledge. Most people also disagree to the notion that older workers increase the costs of a company.

There has been considerable debate as to whether older people should be given differential treatment. Many think it's unfair while others think their importance to the company begs for some kind of special treatment.

Therefore, many managers find it difficult to manage old workers. Older workers have certain expectations from their careers and their life/work balance and younger managers are left in a lurch – 59 percent think it is difficult for young people to manage older workers.

Customized approaches to encourage older workers

Therefore, customized approaches need to be put into place so that the value of these older workers is maintained and at the same time motivates them. This involves encouragement both at the time of recruitment and during the job.

More than 50 percent of managers say that they have over the years removed the stipulation to mention age on job application forms. In under a decade, the number of such companies has gone from 44 to 64 percent and this is a welcome change as a lot of bias has been reported at the recruiting level. It effectively tackles discrimination due to age. It not only ensures impartiality against the ageing workforce which might be considered redundant but it also adds diversity to the workforce. There are few differences in recruitment practice by sector or size.

Apart from making these essential change in recruitment practices, managers also need to make sure that they foster such a work environment where the younger workers respect and value older workers, their advice and the skills. They can achieve this is by including the older workforce in brainstorming sessions for important tasks at the company and recognizing achievements.

Provide training to the older people

All organizations should provide training without regard to age and to suit a variety of learning styles. An overwhelming majority of the companies are ahead on this. But this is not it.

Only one-third of organizations offer pre-retirement training and around half have opportunities for workers to mentor others. This can be a useful initiative especially for the MWBEs where the businesses are small and specialty-based. Skill transferring can be a useful initiative. Mentoring is a one-on-one relationship it can benefit older and younger workers both equally. What it will do most is enhance the older workers self-esteem.

To promote all of these types of training initiatives, it is pertinent for managers to have proper trained staff in place. They need to keep in mind the needs of all of the workers and customize their approach to suit the needs of those requiring special attention.

Allow flexible work practices

Continuing from what was said earlier about customizing training and rules of workplace according to the needs of certain individuals, especially older people, some other flexible work practices should definitely be on any manager's agenda too. This would help these ageing workers to achieve a better work-life balance, which is essential for their well-being. The manager should allow older people to have flexible hours as well as flexible modes of working such as when they can work at home they should do it from home rather than coming to the office. It will help ease them into their retirement phase rather than an abrupt retirement. Remote working is also something that MWBEs can employ more easily than large corporations.