



Myths about Older Workers

Myth 1: You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Reality: Studies show only negligible loss of cognitive function of people under 70. While older workers take longer to absorb completely new material, their better study attitudes and accumulated experience lower training costs. The fastest growing group of Internet users is people over 50.

Myth 2: Training older workers is a lost investment because they will not stay on the job for long.

Reality: The future worklife of an employee over 50 usually exceeds the life of new technology for which the workers are trained.

Myth 3: Older workers are not as productive as younger workers.

Reality: Overall productivity does not decline as a function of age. Productivity can actually rise due to greater worker accuracy, dependability and capacity to make better on the spot judgements. Older worker's production rates are steadier than other age groups.

Myth 4: Older workers are less flexible and adaptable.

Reality: Older workers are just as adaptable once they understand the reason for changes. They are more likely to ask *why*, because they have often seen past changes in processes and procedures abandoned in mid-stream when they didn't bring expected rewards quickly enough.

Myth 5: Older workers are not as creative or innovative.

Reality: General intelligence levels are the same as younger workers. Eighty percent of the most workable and worthwhile new production ideas are produced by employees over 40 years old.

Myth 6: Older workers cost more than hiring younger workers.

Reality: While workers with tenure are entitled to more vacation time and pension costs related to

number of years worked, replacing workers is not cost free. Aetna Insurance Company did a study of this issue and discovered these factors added 93% to the first year's salary of new employees.

Myth 7: Benefit and accident costs are higher for older workers.

Reality: Total sick days per year of older workers is lower than other age groups because they have

fewer acute illness and sporadic sick days. While individual older worker's health, disability and life insurance costs do rise slowly with age, they are offset by lower costs due to fewer dependents. Overall, fringe benefits costs stay the same as a percentage of salary for all age groups. Older workers take fewer risks in accident prone situations and statistically have lower accident rates than other age groups.

Employee Qualities Most Desired Overall (according to HR Managers)		Top Qualities of Older Employees (according to HR Managers)	
Rank	Quality	Rank	Quality
1	Commitment to doing quality work	1	Loyalty and dedication to the company
2	Get along with coworkers	2	Commitment to doing quality work
3	Solid performance record	3	Someone you can count on in a crisis
4	Basic skills in reading, writing, arithmetic	4	Solid performance record
5	Someone you can count on in a crisis	5	Basic skills in reading, writing, arithmetic
6	Willing to be flexible about doing different tasks	6	Solid experience in job and/or industry
7	Loyalty and dedication to the company	7	Get along with coworkers

Source: American Business and Older Employees. AARP. Washington DC: 2000; Bureau of Labor Statistics