



Victoria Jump: Older workforce, new challenges

Jan 31, 2015

Ventura County Star

Older workers, defined as 55 plus, are finding themselves in a predicament. Financial reality dictates that they work longer. However, many employers see the higher salaries and skill updating needs of older workers as disadvantages, making it harder for people to continue in a job or to find work.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, for the next 15 years about 10,000 baby boomers in the United States will turn 65 every day. Especially in higher cost-of-living areas like Ventura County, their nest eggs will not be nearly enough to retire.

Boomers will need to update their knowledge, skills and networking continuously to stay savvy and relevant in the job market.

Stay on top of your game

By 2016, one-third of the total U.S. workforce will be over 50. Smart employers will offer training to their employees (no matter the age) because a well-trained workforce is a more productive workforce. Mature workers should take advantage of any opportunity to keep their skills and knowledge up to date.

Training opportunities also can be found through programs listed at CalJobs (www.caljobs.ca.gov) and available through Workforce Investment Board funding at the America's Job Center of California (AJCC) locations in Ventura County (www.wib.ventura.org).

We have found at the Area Agency on Aging that people with a new certificate or credential for an in-demand skill become more attractive to potential and current employers. Some older workers wait too long to update their skill sets. Especially for the unemployed, the sooner they can be trained, the sooner they will find success in the job market.

Two other programs in Ventura County also are helpful for older job-seekers. Networking through Experience Unlimited "job clubs," sponsored by the Employment Development Department (EDD), help technical, managerial, sales and executive job seekers.

While members support one another through the process of finding a job, EDD services and workshops are available to update job-search skills.

The Senior Community Employment Program (www.doleta.gov/seniors), for those 55 and older, is a federal government program that provides subsidized job training for older workers who are entering the job market later in life — not by choice, but because of their economic situations.

Information for this and other job search and job training programs can be accessed through the America's Job Center of California locations (www.wib.ventura.org). Locally, the contractors for this program are the National Association for Hispanic Elderly and SER (Service, Employment and Redevelopment) Jobs for Progress.

Beyond the work characteristics that define the baby boomer generation — results-driven, hardworking, reliable and dedicated — these mature workers have invaluable work and life experiences of the kind that only years can bring.

Older worker advantage

Boomers are typically more focused on doing what it takes to complete a job well, and they are experienced at teamwork and communication. True, there are generational differences in the workplace, and the generations must learn to work together. However, boomers have what millennials don't — job loyalty.

A Bureau of Labor Statistics survey found more than 55 percent of workers age 55 to 64 have been working for the same employer for 10 years or more. Compare that with 42.7 percent of workers ages 25 to 34 who stay in their jobs for two years or less.

For employers, these statistics are especially important when considering the high costs associated with recruiting, training and turnover. Retaining older workers and providing supplemental training can be more cost-effective than hiring younger workers who might be inclined to jump ship at the first opportunity to move up the corporate ladder. A 55-year-old who wants (or needs) to work can be expected to be on the job 10 years or more.

Baby boomers are not only redefining aging by living longer and healthier. They offer a real competitive advantage to businesses looking for employees with broad skill sets who also can be experienced coaches for younger workers.

We have a talent pool of older workers and forward-thinking employers need to take advantage of it.

Victoria Jump is director of the Area Agency on Aging Ventura County and a member of the Workforce Investment Board of Ventura County.