

Consultants' Corner

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Our Aging Workforce: A Look at the Benefits of Job Accommodation

From the desk of Beth Loy, Ph.D.

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Today, more than 35 million Americans are over age 65, and that number is expected to double over the next 30 years as baby boomers age.¹ Whether for monetary or social reasons, many individuals continue working after age 65. There are several federal employment laws that could protect these older workers from discrimination. These include the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), which requires employers to provide accommodations for older workers with disabilities. Though it may be a legal requirement that employers make accommodations for their aging workforce, it also makes good economic sense. Older workers are a vital segment of today's workforce. The Older Workers Survey² reported several possible advantages to hiring older workers; these benefits include that older workers:

- Are more willing to work different schedules,
- Serve as mentors for workers with less experience,
- Have invaluable experience,
- Are more reliable,
- Have higher retention rates,
- Have more knowledge and skills, and
- Are more productive.

Some older individuals have retired from one form of work and chose to switch careers or work part-time to earn extra money and maintain insurance benefits, keep active, learn new skills, or socialize. With the aging of the baby-boom generation, the average age for workers will increase, and the likelihood that more employees will be managing a disability rises.

Many individuals will continue to work at full production with no accommodations. However, aging may contribute to limitations that can easily and cheaply be accommodated. Age-related limitations can involve a wide range of conditions, including depression and anxiety, repetitive use injuries, and other cognitive, sensory, and physical limitations.

Individuals may need accommodations related to the psychological aspects of aging, mobility, fatigue, cognitive limitations, and vision and hearing impairments. For ideas on how to accommodate older workers, see [JAN's Effective Accommodation Practices Series on Accommodations for the Aging Workforce](#).

As many of us age, our limitations may be from aging, returning to work after an injury, the occurrence of a primary disability, the exacerbation of a long-term impairment, and/or prevention of a secondary impairment. However, employing an aging and productive workforce brings invaluable knowledge, diversity, reliability, and experience to a workplace. Accommodating and employing aging workers can be an easy way to improve teamwork and morale, which can foster success in every workplace.

Aging Workforce Resources

References

- 1. U.S. Administration on Aging. (2005). Statistics on the aging population.
- 2. [SHRM](#) Survey Program. (2003). 2003 SHRM/NOWCC/CED Older workers survey. Alexandria, Virginia: SHRM Research.