

Engaging and Retaining Boomers

Planning ahead for the many mid-lifers
who are rethinking their careers

By Maureen S. Catania

*W*ith experts from Statistics Canada and the Conference Board of Canada predicting millions of baby boomers will retire soon, employers could find themselves in a tight labour market once the economy rebounds. As a result, they need to start planning for societal (?) changes that will affect how they attract and retain a skilled workforce in the future.

But wait a minute! Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, have established themselves as the workaholic generation. This highly experienced, well-educated and ingeniously resourceful generation is interested in staying active, involved and engaged at work beyond the age of 65. So do employers need to be concerned about retaining talented boomers? Absolutely.





This generation of workers is rethinking their careers and looking at a wider range of work opportunities – especially those whose careers are not serving them well. Their decision to stay put is largely influenced by working conditions rather than money. Talented boomers have other options including self-employment and second-career training, so engaging them early to retain them longer will ensure your company will have the workforce it needs for business success.

As the number of baby boomers retiring is unknown, as is the number who plan to continue in their jobs or pursue second careers, workforce planning is now a key component to any company's Strategic Planning process.

Workforce planning begins with getting a current demographic profile of your workforce; measuring the level of employee engagement; and examining all the elements needed to improve the performance and productivity of your staff. These steps will help prepare your company for the reality of managing a workforce in a tight labour market.

Once you have the above information, you'll want to assess it. For example, what impact could the demographic profile have on your organization? What are the retirement plans of each group? Is there a succession process in place for "business critical" employees and has your company identified potential internal candidates to step into these positions? Should steps be considered to encourage staying beyond "normal" retirement age? Then you can determine what you have and what you may need in terms of manpower.

After you measure the level of engagement of your current workforce, you'll want to look at what you can do to improve it. The more engaged your workforce is, the more productive it is – and the manpower required can be reduced and/or re-allocated.

To improve engagement, you can break down the process to identify a systematic performance development methodology, both for individuals and groups. There are five basic steps in this process:

1 Understanding employee fit and compatibility to current job

In most cases, when an individual doesn't perform well in a job, it's because of two elements: poor fit with the job and/or poor interaction with a supervisor and/or fellow workers. (This also has a direct correlation on people who are top-performers in their job.) It is, therefore, important to evaluate job fit and compatibility for as many employees as possible. Some boomers may be planning to leave their job once the economy rebounds because the fit isn't right anymore. They may have outgrown the work they do in their current job. People's strengths and interests evolve over the years. But they may also be in the wrong job with the right company.

Matching a person's cognitive ability, occupational interests and work-related behaviour to a job are key elements to predicting a per-



son's success at work, according to an extensive study conducted by Harvard Business Review. Progressive employers are already using this data to make accurate and strategic hiring and promotion decisions, and they are also using it to develop their people for greater success. This same information can be used by individuals to make better career moves. A good employer will be invested in retaining its talent, and therefore willing to help employees with a career assessment process.

2 Understanding motivation and stress, conflict behaviours and adapting to change

All people develop a "style" when interacting with their supervisor or fellow employees. For many that style is a natural extension of who they are. For some, role playing is involved. Knowing how a person reacts to stress and what motivates an individual gives a manager insight into how to motivate the person individually rather than in a group.

3 Optimizing working relationships with a direct supervisor

Too many people have some conflict with their supervisor. Knowing what, why and how to address these situations will have extraordinary positive effects on job performance. With significant generational differences in the workplace, employees need to know more about their working styles and others they work with, work for or supervise.

4 Optimizing relationships with work teams

“Teamwork” may be an overused expression, but companies frequently talk about it and need to better learn how to facilitate it. The ability of a team to work together effectively is greatly influenced by the compatibility of the team members. While some teams can adjust to accommodate compatibility issues, the fewer the adjustments, the more efficient the team will function. By understanding the characteristics of the team members, the more focused the management of that team. Increased synergy among teams and team members always results in greater productivity.

5 Optimizing leaderships skills

A bad manager negatively affects attitudes, productivity and turnover. The relationship an employee has with their manager is often a key factor in maintaining their employment with a company. It is often quoted, “People don’t leave companies - they leave managers.” Helping leaders identify their strengths and areas that need improvement will give them the opportunity to develop the competencies that are most important to their professional growth and success.

Through the use and application of workforce assessments, you can apply each of these performance development steps and gain a better understanding of how your employees think, work and feel in relation to their jobs. Knowing this information about your people will help you to engage them now and retain them longer, so your company will have the employees it needs to succeed going forward. ✱



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