



## Mature Assets

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Last time, I wrote about the 'Reluctant Retiree' and how retirement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is a very different beast than it used to be. Continuing where I left off, I want to show potential employers how vital older, productive workers are and how to attract, integrate and encourage them.

Essential to the continued productivity of older workers is respect in the workplace and acceptance from employers and co-workers and this is, in part, the responsibility of employers to set up.

The median age of members of the working population is rising and employers will slowly have a larger pool of older workers to draw from and work with than younger ones. Not only that, people have a tendency to remain in the workforce longer than in previous generations because of an increased life expectancy and quality of life often combined with inadequate pension and retirement income.

Employers need to overcome some of the stereotypes preventing them from making the best use of this valuable growing resource.

Many assume that older people are likely to take more sick days than younger workers when, in reality, it is often the other way around. Nor should it be assumed that older people lack ambition and sticking power.

Some employers are uncomfortable hiring older people. They are worried that these employees will be over-qualified, too experienced, or that they just won't 'fit in' with the current office/workplace environment.

Obviously, the best way to overcome some of these barriers is to meet each potential employee individually and discuss their particular ambitions, motivations and abilities before precluding them based on their date of birth.

Once the value of older employees is recognised, the next task is to find ways to attract them/us.

A conscientious employer will seek ways to make the working environment and atmosphere comfortable and challenging to all his employees—young and old—and recognise the individual abilities and unique skills of each person on his payroll.

Most organisations have policies covering equal opportunities for those of difference race, gender and disability. Age, a potential discriminatory label, should also be part of any equality policy.

In your job ads, emphasize the scope of work and skill requirements so that it is clear to any applicant just what is expected of them in the position. Mention any training that will be offered. This assures the older applicant that he or she will have an opportunity to 'catch up' if necessary.

Where you place your ads will also affect your outcome. Newspapers are still popular with older applicants but so too are job seeker websites, particularly those dedicated to more mature workers (such as [www.55PlusPros](http://www.55PlusPros))

Older employees learn and work differently from many fresh-out-of-school employees. What they may lack in state-of-the-art training, they more than compensate for with practical experience and the knowledge that allows them to readily apply classroom theory to real workplace situations.

Adapt your training procedures to accommodate older workers who, perhaps, are a little intimidated by new technology, particularly if they have been out of the workplace for a period of time.

Also, it is important to tap into the unique skill sets and experiences that older workers bring to your business. What older employees may lack in physical vigour, they often make up in their supervisory and leadership abilities. Installing them as mentors is an ideal way to reap the benefits of their accumulated wisdom while investing in the sustainability of your company and its workers. Don't forget that younger workers eventually step up to become older workers.

Also attractive to older workers are flexible or reduced hours and potential job sharing options. These options may require a bit of an organisational shuffle, but they are good options for a business seeking to broaden its talent pool, possibly save a few dollars and have readily available back-up on hand in the event of prolonged employee absences.

Once hired, your older workers should not be left to tread water just putting in time. Like every other member of your team, training and advancement opportunities should be made available to them. Without blocking the upward mobility of junior staff, you can provide sideways career moves for older workers, add variety to their job descriptions and, as mentioned before, allow them to mentor the up-and-comers.

As fully functional and valued employees, it is also important that you do not allow drops in performance and productivity to go unchecked. It is both disrespectful and inefficient and leans towards a reverse form of discrimination that may be resented by other members of your staff.

The goal is to achieve equality among all employees while recognising and utilising the special skills and abilities of each individual. It doesn't matter if you are hiring the young, the old, or those somewhere in between, you want the best tools in your tool box working together to create the ultimate business machine that is productive, creative, happy, profitable and enduring.