

newsworthy trends

Senior Workers: Reliable, Productive And Enthusiastic

(NAPSA)—A funny thing happened in the wake of the dot-com disaster: America stopped rushing out to hire the youngest “it” boy on the block, and started looking at his gray-haired grandpop.

Across the country, companies are beginning to see the wisdom in hiring older, more experienced workers—and the change is more the result of good business sense than altruism. Apart from the hard lessons learned in the wake of numerous failed dot-coms with young boy and girl wonders at their helm, American companies across the board are coming to the inevitable realization that the nation is graying.

By the year 2019, nearly a third of the population is expected to be 55 and older. However, labor force growth won't have dropped enough to offset the shortages caused by more retirees.

Anticipating that trend, smart employers and seniors' programs have begun retraining older workers and reintegrating them into the workforce.

“Any company that is continuing to put its head in the sand and pretend that there aren't more older workers in the workplace is going to fall behind in this very competitive business in this country,” says Deborah Russell, manager of economic security for AARP, an advocacy group for individuals over 50. “They can no longer afford to ignore the older worker.”

Bob Mizerak, director of the Urban League's Seniors in Community Service Program, says the fact that companies are offering seniors a second shot at employment is good news since many seniors, upon retirement, find themselves living on fixed incomes that fall far short of their needs.



As the population “grays,” seniors are becoming an important part of the workforce.

African-Americans and other minorities especially feel the retirement crunch. Whereas nine percent of white elderly live in poverty, about 22 percent of African-American and 19 percent of Hispanic elderly live in poverty.

The Urban League's Seniors in Community Service Program—which targets seniors who are at 125 percent or below the poverty line—is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor under Title V of the Older Americans Act. Administered by Urban League affiliates, it helps thousands of seniors begin new careers and supplement their incomes each year.

“The major source of income for older people is Social Security, and for many it's not enough,” says Mizerak. “So they are forced to get a job to survive retirement.”

According to Experience Works, a national nonprofit group that works with mature individuals, companies like Discover Financial Services, CVS and the U.S. Census Bureau have placed a high priority on hiring older workers, typically using retirees in entry-

level positions such as greeters, sales clerks and census takers.

Companies like Wal-Mart and ABN Amro, a bank out of Chicago, have begun to create flexible schedules and good benefits designed to retain aging workers.

To make seniors more marketable, the Urban League's program offers training in the high-demand area of computers, as well as child care and teacher mentoring. It places them in jobs where they receive health benefits and last year, on average, made \$7.52 an hour.

Last year, Sodhexo Food Management Corporation hired two of the Richmond, Va., Urban League's seniors as dishwashers. George Mason, a 76-year-old retiree, quickly became a star employee doing inventory and sales.

“The Urban League sent over Mr. Mason. He's smart, disciplined, and has an excellent work ethic,” says Mike McCleary, manager of Sodhexo. “I'd be a fool not to hire him.”

Mizerak says a second career gives seniors renewed purpose. And, contrary to myths, seniors do not pose a higher risk of work-related injuries; they make up 14.5 percent of the workforce, but account for only 9.5 percent of workplace injuries.

“The next step,” concludes Mizerak, “is to get mature workers into higher positions and salaries, but until then we're here to make sure seniors get the jobs needed to put food on their table, pay their rent, gas and light bill, and maintain their dignity.”

For more information about the Seniors in Community Service Program or to make a donation, visit www.nul.org or contact the Urban League in your area.