

## Series Topics

- The changing face of workforce demographics
- Myths about older workers
- Multi-generational interaction at the workplace
- Elder care benefits
- Leveraging the changing demographics
- Marketing to the older consumer

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Please contact us with comments, questions or suggestions...

## Iowa Consortium for Applied Gerontology

University of Northern Iowa  
125 Sabin Hall  
Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0403  
Phone: (319) 273-7961  
Web: [www.iacag.org](http://www.iacag.org)

This information is part of a series of brief publications from the Iowa Consortium for Applied Gerontology (IaCAG) located at the University of Northern Iowa. It is designed to raise awareness about the aging population in Iowa and how these changes may impact businesses, employees, and consumers.

## Leveraging the Changing Demographics

It comes as no shock that the Baby Boomer generation continues to influence workforce trends. Aging has not diminished their impact on the economy. In fact, they are one of the most influential economic population segments due to their sheer numbers and spending habits. One of the most visible impacts they have on the economy is observed in employment statistics. Although many of the Baby Boomers are approaching the traditional retirement age, they may not retire from the workforce. AARP research shows that 80 percent of Boomers expect to continue working in some form past the age of 65.<sup>1</sup> While many of these Boomers may willingly continue to be employed, others may have to cancel or postpone their plans of retirement due to economic pressures. This simply means that more and more US businesses are now facing issues connected with adjusting to an aging workforce. Older workers have different needs and preferences than younger workers, and in order to retain them, businesses will have to consider and respond to these differences.

### Factors considered essential for an ideal job by workers age 45-74.<sup>2</sup>

- Adequate paid time off (86%)
- Respect from supervisors (86%)
- Flexible schedule (76%)
- On-the-job training (73%)
- Adequate health insurance (84%)
- Good pension plan (76%)

#### Sources:

1. [http://www.aarp.org/about\\_aarp/aarp\\_leadership/on\\_issues/aging\\_issues/a2002-12-31-novel-liretirement.html](http://www.aarp.org/about_aarp/aarp_leadership/on_issues/aging_issues/a2002-12-31-novel-liretirement.html)
2. [http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/econ/d17772\\_multiwork.pdf](http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/econ/d17772_multiwork.pdf)
3. <http://www.aarp.org/research/press-center/presscurrentnews/a2004-08-24-employers.html>
4. <http://www.microsoft.com/enable/aging/default.aspx>

Many businesses have taken the lead in leveraging the demographic changes in the workforce by incorporating the needs of older workers into their human resource practices. The following companies were recognized by AARP as best employers for workers over 50 in 2004<sup>3</sup>:

- Adecco Employment Services
- Beaumont Hospitals
- Deere & Company
- Principal Financial Group
- Stanley Consultants, Inc

AARP states that the employment policies and practices of these companies are favorable to older workers, including the workplace culture and training opportunities provided. Some of the companies on this list have maintained their positions over the past few years. However, one should not confuse their willingness to accommodate the needs of older workforce as simply a nice gesture; rather, it is a very sound business decision. This decision is deemed increasingly valuable considering the shortfall of workers in certain industries such as health care, thus creating the need to attract and retain skilled older workers.

Acknowledging the issues that may arise from this aging trend in the US workforce, Microsoft's web site provides information on how employers can use accessible technology to deal with the demographic changes in the workforce. The resources on their web site highlight the significant effects, the aging workforce will have on business growth and productivity. Understanding the importance of electronic media in the future of communications and business, Microsoft has put forward a variety of accessible technology measures that are specifically aimed at computer users with disabilities associated with old age. While providing details of the demographic shift, the web site emphasizes how accessible technology can equip companies to face the perceived challenges and aid in maintaining workforce efficiency in all age groups.<sup>4</sup>

#### Why Hire Older Workers?

While 13.6% of workforce is over the age of 55, they account for only 9.7% of on-the-job injuries.<sup>1</sup>

Workers over 50 file fewer workers compensation claims than younger workers. The largest numbers of claims are filed by those age 30-34.<sup>1</sup>

It should also be noted that implementing workforce-friendly policies for older workers and work culture is not always a capital-intensive project. A corporate policy of consistent age-sensitive measures can contribute to an overall atmosphere conducive to older employees as well as older customers. An anecdotal example of such measures is an auto repair shop that pays special attention to the generally encountered hearing disabilities of their senior customers and, as a solution, now has designated a noise-free area to conduct discussions with them.

IaCAG has been working actively with prominent regional businesses to create further awareness of this and other issues concerning management of an aging workforce and consumer base.

Visit our website at <http://www.iacag.org> for more information on other aging issues

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