

CAREER TRANSITION FOR EMPLOYEES > 50

Old age only starts when you lose curiosity

(1) Preliminary Note

With unprecedented demographic changes happening in highly industrialized countries a shortage of labour is predicted. The baby boomer generation turned 55 in 2012 and an ageing population leads to an increase in the average age of the workforce as a whole which represents a challenge for companies and labour markets. It also accounts for an ever increasing amount of career transition services within that age group. What are the implications when those over 50s are faced not only with a higher retirement age but also potentially with a second or third career in their working life? And what does this consequently mean for us and our work with them in career transition programmes?



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The December ACF Europe Newsletter
will feature an article by Mark Richter
(CEO at OTP, Switzerland)

(2) Why companies separate from older employees

Companies look for employees between 25 and 35 because it is assumed that they have more energy, they are fit in modern IT technology, are adaptable and work longer hours, have less health problems and cost less. Older employees are said to be expensive, less tech savvy, they are slow, unable or unwilling to learn or adapt to changes in the organization and have increasing health problems. Yet, the reality is that younger workers have just as many problems as older workers – just different ones and some of the reasons are purely coincidental to older employees.

Still, separating from older employees reduces all the problems associated with them including the average age in the company, and also reduces staff costs and pension provisions.

(3) What speaks for older employees

The over 50s don't have kids pulling them away constantly; while possibly lacking technology affinity they have experience in getting things done in different ways and won't panic when the internet goes down for 15 minutes. They are willing to be loyal to the company for the next 7-10 years, which is more loyalty than you may get from a young person, and with their understanding of loyalty they will work until a problem is solved. Statistically, older workers don't miss out on work more than younger workers.

(4) What makes it so hard for older employees to find new positions

The biggest fight is against prejudice. One of the issues over hiring older workers is the fact that they may have more experience than the manager whom they would work for; they may have even done the same job in the past. It could definitely be an intimidating factor for younger managers. Other stumbling blocks may be a lack of interest or ability to learn about new technology, processes and procedures; or an inflexibility to integrate into a new organization coupled with slower working methods and out-of-date technology knowledge. Overall, there is a doubt as to the amortization of the cost associated with hiring and training an older worker as well as fear that an older employee will suck more energy from the organization than he is able to contribute.

For these critical reasons a certain age group for an open position may have been defined internally without being publicly displayed.

(5) What can we do as outplacement consultants to facilitate the Job Search for this particular group of people

Whereas we don't see a major difference between counselling career transition for the under or over 50s based on our broad experience in outplacement services across all age groups we are able to identify and summarize some key areas that we consider crucial to a successful career transition of the over 50s

- (a) As people get older they are considered slower thinkers that are stuck in their ways and don't like change. It is therefore important to provide coaching to improve or mobilize the mental flexibility that is required to steer through a complex change situation. Mental flexibility involves for example formulating a plan for the next steps coupled with the ability to switch gears if something unexpected happens and a different response is needed. The ability to be curious and develop alternative explanations, re-frame negative situations positively and to accept challenging or distressing events are also recognized aspects of mental flexibility.
- (b) In counselling the candidate, give high priority to validation and presentation of their individual competency profile, check the important "chemistry" aspect – focus on preparing how to lower any barriers that may exist on the other side and facilitate a positive decision in the new organization.
- (c) Shift away from traditional search methods of job applications with many competitors towards approaching potential employers directly and intensifying the use of the network
- (d) Consider other options of employment models e.g. freelance. Studies say that in the long-term the freelance model is the work form with the strongest growth potential and here are some of the advantages from a company' perspective
 - I. Integration risks that may be associated with older employees are prevented. Even though the image of this group of employees has changed and improved over the last decade some reservations prevail.
 - II. When companies offer retirement programmes on the one hand it would be difficult to hire someone from the potential target group at the same time
 - III. By working with freelancers the impact on the head count in the company is avoided. The tendency to count FTEs in relation to revenue makes it attractive to get the work done with freelancers rather than employees. At the same time it is easier to terminate the cooperation when no longer required
- (e) Consider searching for several part-time jobs and enable targeting a different set of companies or smaller organizations as they may require a specific skill set or qualification but can't afford a fulltime person.

(6) Conclusion

The over 50s have a lot to offer in terms of talent and potential provided they have appropriate mental flexibility and curiosity. Within this framework as a new employee they may not take on a senior management role but with their experience and skill set should convey determination to achieve better times for the company and contribute and enhance the energy in an organization.

Working on career transition with the > 50s requires what may seem a bigger effort for the counsellor in providing yet more empathy and commitment – yet a successful placement in this challenging field also results in more satisfaction and happiness for us. Overall we see no difference in the landing results only in the duration before success.

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ACF EUROPE SURVEY

ACF Europe is conducting a European Wide Survey by the end of November.

ACF Members will be invited to participate in this online survey.

The results will be discussed during a Webinar which is planned for the first week of February 2015. Details will follow.

ACF EUROPE CONFERENCE

ACF Europe will organise a conference in Amsterdam from Thursday night 21 May to Friday afternoon 22 May 2015.

Please put these dates in your diary. As soon as we have more details we will inform you.

Please let us know if you have any topics you would like to discuss during the conference.

