

3 reasons older employees can help make a good workplace

Older, more experienced job seekers often feel like they have to prove their worth when going up against today's younger candidates. Faced with competing against a 20- or 30-something for a job, they often feel insecure about their place in today's working world, alienated from new technologies, skeptical of new methods and apprehensive about their role as the elder statesman in the hierarchy of their new potential new employer.

Here are three ways older workers can benefit today's employers:

1. Strong and steady: Marty Gilbert, founder and CEO of the NorthShore Executive Networking Group in the Chicago suburbs, says older workers can bring a sense of stability to companies. "There are a lot of companies that think, well, I want to catch that younger employee on the way up — they've got more energy, they have more promise, they're hungrier — and if we can build a career for them, they're going to stay here forever," says Gilbert. "But in many cases, if that person — the younger hire — doesn't get what they want within two years, they're out."

Gilbert argues that employees who are hired when they're in their 40s, 50s or beyond already have enough experience to know a good job when they see it and they often perform accordingly. "Someone who is 47 or 48, who's been with a couple of different companies knows a good situation," Gilbert says. "They hit the ground running. They're productive from day one, they know how to handle problems without making everything a crisis and they can be incredibly loyal."

2. Conversation starters: We've all met plenty of millennials and Gen Z workers who are masters of conversation but that doesn't mean older workers can't draw on experiences from the past to help fill in some gaps with a new company. And we're not talking about small chunks of information presented in texts or Instagram posts. We're talking about real face-to-face conversations,

which are still an important element in creating a strong company culture.

Experienced workers have the benefit of seeing their world through a different set of lenses, meaning they can be a great source of perspective during workplace discussions, and many of them feel comfortable striking up a conversation with their co-workers. "A lot of older workers are just as addicted to social media as their younger counterparts and I'm sure a lot of them prefer texting over talking but there is a value in employees who can recall those days when face-to-face communication was king," says Ella Mayfair, a workplace consultant in Tampa, Florida. "There's a limit, of course, but the people who can start a conversation when they see you at the water cooler or in the elevator, those are the people who can really make an office feel like home."

3. Increased flexibility: One of the unsaid benefits of hiring younger workers is their perceived willingness to work various hours, travel to different locations and do different things but in reality, flexibility may be as limited for someone in their 20s as it is perceived to be for someone older. And if employees have young children at home — no matter their age — or other responsibilities outside the workplace, it can be tough to work outside the norm. "That's one of the benefits of having a workforce that's diverse in age," says Mayfair. "You have people with no children, people with small children, people with kids in and then out of college. It gives you more options when it comes time to do things that don't fit into the 9-to-5 definition of the workday, even though that definition is already dramatically different than it was 30, 20 or even 10 years ago."

Mayfair says the point is that there are numerous employees in their 40s and 50s who are more than willing to take the one-night, one-week or one-month trip to your biggest client because they have "less going on at home," as Mayfair says.

— Marco Buscaglia, *Careers*