

Aging in the Workplace



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Working in seniors living, it is very likely that at some point you will work with colleagues who have been with the organization for many years, up to several decades. These colleagues bring a wealth of experience and knowledge and leave big shoes to fill once they retire. Your team may be a mix of seasoned team members who may be hesitant to change, as well as newcomers who bring fresh perspectives, but less experience. As your team evolves, you may ask, will I find the right people? How will I train new team members and support the experienced members? These are common questions that many organizations will have to face as they navigate intergenerational work environments.

1 The Impact of an Aging Workforce

Baby boomers, defined as those born between 1946 and 1965, represent the largest generation in Canada.¹ Moreover, older workers in Canada, usually defined as people older than 55, nearly tripled in number from 1996 to 2018.² As of October 2021, 68.2% of people aged 55 to 64 were working.³ As this population retires, younger workers will need to fill this significant gap in labour and experience.

2 Factors Driving Continued Workforce Participation Among Older Adults

Several factors contribute to older adults staying in the workplace.

- People are enjoying longer and healthier lives, motivating them to stay socially and physically active through work.⁴
- Financial considerations may delay retirement - in 2022 one in five seniors aged 65 to 74 were employed—almost half of them by necessity.⁵
- Due to the smaller generations following the baby boomers, there is a demand for workers to stay in the workforce to help ease the labour shortage.⁷

3 Challenges in Healthcare and Seniors Living Foodservice

As the workforce continues to age, healthcare and senior living foodservice departments face several challenges that require careful consideration and planning.

These challenges may include:

1. Absenteeism is less common with older workers, however they may need longer recovery times when dealing with injuries or illnesses.⁶
2. Lower workplace engagement due to lack of recognition, job-related stress and feeling unsupported in the work environment.⁶
3. Some aging staff members are finding it challenging to keep up with the physical demands of their role, especially with shift work. This may lead to added strain in the workplace.⁶

Addressing these challenges requires proactive measures and a comprehensive approach that recognizes older workers and their contributions to the organization. Additionally, providing a safe work environment through proper equipment, training, support and risk assessment is imperative.⁶



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4 Strategies for Addressing Aging Workforce Challenges

Programs and initiatives that encourage intergenerational collaboration and workplace well-being will support your team to ensure the successful transfer of knowledge and experience to newer members.

- 1. Intergenerational Workshops and Training:** Regular workshops and in-service training for all team members can facilitate knowledge sharing between employees from different age and experience groups. This can help employees acquire valuable insights from their experienced colleagues and learn new material and procedures together as a team.
- 2. Supporting a Culture of Transparency:** Nurturing honesty and encouraging your team to come forward with challenges helps everyone be successful. This could also include supporting team members with one-on-one meetings and peer support to work together on solutions.
- 3. Cross-Training and Development:** Offer opportunities to participate in other areas of operations to promote cross-training and team development. Involve kitchen staff in budgeting and purchasing processes, menu planning, etc. Empower cooks and dietary aides to take charge of inventory management and ordering. This approach will help keep the budget on track and make the kitchen operations more efficient and collaborative.
- 4. Proactive Recruitment and Recognition:** Implement proactive recruitment processes, including employee development and growth, network and engage with potential hires, such as visiting schools to promote your company as a future workplace.
- 5. Consider Incentives:** Include appreciation events, recognition & rewards programs and team-building events! Choose to recognize team members regularly, both formally through performance reviews and reward programs, as well as informally, including shout-outs, cards/notes, and being present - goes a long way!
- 6. Flexible Scheduling:** Older workers may be seeking more flexible work options as they begin to transition to retirement. A flexible approach to staff scheduling, and accommodating casual and seasonal workers, will enable better planning and allocation of much-needed time off for hardworking team members.
- 7. Mentoring and Coaching Programs:** Seasoned workers offer a wealth of knowledge and experience that is incredibly valuable to an organization – offering them opportunities to mentor new team members can help foster a sense of belonging and recognition for their important contributions. These programs provide individualized guidance to employees, supporting their development and progression at all levels within the organization.
- 8. Technology Integration:** Introduce new technology to streamline processes, allowing team members more time to connect with residents and fulfill their work responsibilities. Technology can also help to facilitate interdepartmental communication, thereby fostering a collaborative work environment

By leveraging these strategies, organizations can establish a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture benefiting all experience levels.

The aging workforce is a growing reality that requires proactive and thoughtful management. To address this, organizations should consider focusing on implementing effective change management strategies, fostering adaptability among employees, and embrace creativity in the workplace. By doing so, operators can create an environment that promotes collaboration between seasoned team members and new talent, leading to the discovery of innovative solutions that benefit the entire team and drive overall success.



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