

Managing Your Older Employees

Dealing with multi-generational employees is an art in itself. Young workers want to make a quick impact, they seem to be more up to date, more prompt and more energetic; while the older employees bring an entirely different perspective. They are, in general, more trustworthy, more dedicated and they seldom violate rules.

Now if you are a young entrepreneur, you might find it tough to manage your older employees. Very often, your views on various business issues may differ; at some point of time, you might feel that there is a skill shortage in your elderly workforce; or being more experienced, some of them might try to assert their "supremacy". Although this might seem a petty workplace issue, you can only live with it for some time. Here are some simple ways that can help you bridge the gap between yourself and your older employees.

1. Don't hide your weaknesses: An elderly and hence experienced employee can often point out your mistakes correctly. In that case, don't get defensive. If you do so, it will highlight your weakness and show you up as immature. Remember, there is plenty to learn from the older generation, even if you are their boss!
2. Be a listener: Just because the business is yours, you don't always need to act as if you know everything. Especially when it comes to your older employees, this kind of attitude will not engender their respect towards you. Value the experience of those who are known to be efficient. A good listener of good, valuable advice always wins. You can also teach your young employees not to hesitate to take their seniors' help.
3. Create a perfect team: Your first and foremost job is to form a team whose mission is to achieve a common goal. Each and every team player should know that he or she can reach the target only when working together, regardless of and disparity in age. Further, being the team leader, treat all equally and encourage not only your young workforce, but also the older generation to ask for help (even from the juniors) when needed.
4. Provide seniors with training: To avoid skill shortages, you need to provide your older workers with training. Very often, older employees in particular, get overlooked for training. Most employers believe elderly people are typically resistant to change and difficult to train. These are the biggest myths! Research shows that older learners are keener to learn and are as capable as their younger counterparts when it comes to grasping new skills. They love the challenges that come with mastering new tricks.

It is also a fact that employees aged over 50 are likely to stay with their current job until retirement. Hence, it is wiser to incur the cost of training on them, rather than on younger employees who are waiting to move jobs.

5. Be flexible: With age, come limitations that may not allow your older employees to work full time. In that case, consider options like flextime, part-time work, seasonal or contractual arrangements. You can also allow them to work from home. All of these will go a long way in helping you retain your valuable older workforce.

Effective utilization of the expertise and knowledge of older workers can be of great advantage to any company. However, it is little tricky to tackle elderly people, especially when the boss is much younger. Warren Bennis, eminent Professor of Business Administration at the University of Southern California, says that when managing older workers, a younger manager should imagine how his or her parents would feel being led by him or her, as a way to better understand the sensitive issues concerning the relationship.

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