



Older Workers: America's Surging Asset

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“Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m sixty-four?” Paul McCartney sings these familiar lyrics in the classic Beatles tune. With Americans 75 and over now the fastest-growing age group in the workforce,¹ the answer employers should give when posed that question is a resounding “yes.”

By 2034, the U.S. will have more people over age 65 than under 18 for the first time.² Due to longer life spans and declining birth rates, this normal bell curve will, over time, skew to the right and show an increasingly larger proportion of older adults. How can employers respond to this shift and harness this surging asset?

Embracing older workers accrues myriad advantages for employees, companies, and governments. When it comes to employees, research consistently links work with improved physical, emotional, and cognitive health.³ Companies benefit from the loyalty and commitment of older workers as well as from their skills and experience.⁴ And the longer individuals work, the more money our government reaps from tax revenue and Social Security contributions. For all these reasons, employers must actively prioritize finding ways to attract and retain older workers.

The Elephant in the Room: Ageism

Ingrained and outdated beliefs about aging prevent companies and workers from optimizing the older adult workforce. Research by AARP indicates that nearly two in three adults 50-plus (64 percent) face age discrimination in the workplace today. Among them, nearly all (90 percent) believe that age discrimination against older workers is a common, if not subtle, practice.⁵ It's not unusual for employers to have a mandatory retirement age, which ranges from the 60s for some professions to the 70s for board roles. But these caps are based on an antiquated view of those over age 60—the thinking that careers are on a downward trajectory when, in truth, they are often at a zenith where the individuals' contributions are informed by decades of experience, knowledge, and adaptability.

Consider this irony: John Beard, PhD, the former director of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Department of Aging and Life Course, was forced to retire at age 62.⁶ The WHO's loss is Columbia University's gain, as Dr. Beard now holds an endowed chair at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health.

A quick perusal of advice for LinkedIn users suggests "age-proofing" your resume after age 50 by eliminating education graduation dates and removing pre-2000 employment from your work history.⁷ This advice exacerbates the implicit bias against older adults, which carries consequences for their health and well-being. In *Breaking the Age Code*, Becca Levy, PhD, Professor of Public Health and Psychology at Yale University, quantifies the impact of one's attitude toward aging, finding that positive outlooks extend life expectancy by 7.5 years.

Older Adults Make the Workplace Better

Experts forecast that 40-60 percent of today's jobs will be impacted by AI, thus requiring upskilling and retraining of the workforce.⁸ Among 21st-century skills, the three Cs—creativity, communication, and collaboration, which many older adults possess—are not replaceable by AI, and years of work experience help develop these skills. Add another "C" to the list to represent crystallized intelligence—the ability to apply previously acquired knowledge to new situations, which strengthens with age.⁹ Roles applying these skills can enable older workers to thrive and uniquely contribute to workplaces.

According to Dr. Linda Fried, MD, MPH, Dean of Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, older adults excel at problem-solving and mediation, exhibit emotional stability, and possess a generosity of intent—skills employers should value.¹⁰ At a time when many young adults are experiencing mental health challenges, seasoned colleagues can offer perspective and stability on teams and in one-on-one interactions.

Older employees also tend to possess knowledge informed by years of professional and personal experience. [Eldera.ai](#), a technology platform promoting intergenerational connections among older adults and children 5-17, aims to harness the experience and wisdom of older adults for all generations to thrive. Carl Lavin, an accomplished journalist in his mid-60s who also worked at Meta, now oversees the trust and safety aspects at Eldera.ai, applying his investigative skills, global outlook, and technology expertise. Lavin's role with Eldera.ai allows him to enjoy mission-aligned work while inspiring others like him to "always learn and always teach."

Optimizing the Future of Work for an Aging Society

With longer life spans, many people will need to work for more years to accumulate enough savings to maintain their lifestyle. Whether paid or unpaid, work is often part of one's identity and purpose, termed *ikigai*—that which makes life worth living.¹¹ Dan Buettner's exploration of [Blue Zones](#) reveals that purpose is a key ingredient of regular social engagement and connection. Engaging with purpose—through work, volunteering, caring for a loved one, or continually learning—supports healthy longevity.

We need a society and workplaces that utilize the immense assets of older adults. Employers have an important role to play. They can:

- Attack ageism, which the WHO has declared a crisis and a priority to change.¹² Start by recognizing the harmful internal and societal norms and perceptions about older adults. Employers must strike age-biased phrases such as “digital natives” from job descriptions and understand how screening algorithms may eliminate older workers or dissuade them from applying.¹³
- Offer training programs for hiring managers about implicit age bias and its detrimental effect on hiring processes and within the workplace. Also, replace mandatory retirement with more flexible policies that account for skill and function, not simply age.
- Embrace off-ramps and on-ramps as well as part-time or project work for older adults, family caregivers, working parents, and others wishing to benefit from access to flexibility. These flexible arrangements signal a commitment to win-win transitions.
- Encourage “encore” pathways where the skills and experiences of older adults are leveraged in new sectors or positions. Could those who have been family caregivers be trained as care navigators to help colleagues or neighbors make sense of the complex and fragmented maze of medical and non-medical supports? Can an influx of older adults into the classroom as they pursue second or third careers mitigate America’s teacher shortage?¹⁴
- Provide incentives for lifelong learning and retooling skills by making it a part of performance evaluations. Tuition assistance programs offer opportunities to earn degrees and certificates. Many free and low-cost programs abound, such as Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes at universities, LinkedIn Learning, and Massive Open Online (MOOC) courses, which can be embedded in employee development goals.
- Hire fractional executives, especially in start-ups or small companies that do not yet need or cannot afford a full-time general counsel, HR, or CFO professional, but recognize the need for these key leadership roles. Organizations benefit from the experience and steady hand of an older adult who has lathered, rinsed, and repeated in these roles, often in more than one industry sector.

Formal education in one’s 40s, 50s, and 60s can impart new knowledge and foster upskilling and reskilling where workers and employers derive benefits. Employers need to value and enable a work-life structure with a lattice of experiences that includes on-ramps, off-ramps, laterals, and pauses interspersed with episodes of educational pursuits. The future of work is one in which hiring managers see experience as an asset and intentionally look to hire and retain older adults who proudly display their year(s) of graduation and all work experience on their résumés and LinkedIn profiles.

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¹ [Pew Research Center](#)

² [US Census Bureau](#)

³ [Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate et al](#)

⁴ [SHRM](#)

⁵ [DOI.org](#)

⁶ [Forbes](#)

⁷ [Work It Daily](#)

⁸ [IMF.org](#)

⁹ [MIT News](#)

¹⁰ “Trends in Longevity Medicine/Healthcare” panel featuring Dr. Linda Fried, Dr. Nir Barzali, Dr. Mark Lachs at the ROAR Summit: Re-Imagine the Second Half of Life, November 9, 2023.

¹¹ [The Government of Japan – Japan.gov](#)

¹² [DOI.org](#)

¹³ [National Press Foundation](#)

¹⁴ [New York Times](#)