

Reading Passage (258 words): Negative Stereotypes about Older Workers

Reading Time = 4 minutes

A few years back, The Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility at Boston College did a study on what different generations perceive about what older workers are capable of. For this study, "older workers" is defined as over 55. They polled different generations to see what their perceptions were about older workers in categories like mentorship, respect, adaptability to technology, working with younger bosses, and interest in promotion. Interestingly, the authors concluded that ageism is "more entrenched than any of the other 'isms'" they study and that it is sometimes hard "to distinguish oppressor from oppressed." In other words, there are negative stereotypes about older people, and many of them are held by the older workers themselves.

One negative stereotype is that older workers can not keep up. The assumption behind this idea is older people have health and metabolism issues which prevent them from working at the same pace as younger workers. Or, due to the lack of knowledge with new technology, older workers will have difficulty being as productive as younger workers in their companies.

Another negative stereotype is that older workers do not make good entrepreneurs. The belief reinforcing this stereotype is that only the super-young business whiz kids are capable of founding new businesses with fresh technology.

The final stereotype is that older workers are more expensive. Those who support this stereotype believe that older people, since they have so much experience, require higher salaries. In addition, because older people have more health issues, their healthcare costs will be more higher than younger workers.

Lecture (385 words): Dispelling Three Commonly-Held Beliefs about Older Workers

Now that you have read about the common stereotypes others have of older workers, let's dispel those false beliefs by looking at the truth about older workers.

In reality, older workers are just as productive as anyone else, and often even more because their experience lets them work better, faster or smarter. Older employees are rightfully known for having higher standards and a stronger work ethic and stronger loyalty than many younger people. Yes, sometimes there may be a slower learning curve as we add new ideas and technologies to our already-vast portfolio of knowledge, but there is no loss of ability to learn for most people.

In addition, in fact, older workers make great entrepreneurs. Duke University's Vivek Wadhwa studied hundreds of technology ventures and found that, despite all the buzz about the super-young business whiz kids, the average founder of a high-tech startup is a mature 40 with solid experience. I've worked with founding CEOs who were in their late 70s. And older entrepreneurs succeed at a much higher rate. To put it into statistics, the Kauffman Foundation found that company founders who are over 55 have twice the chance of succeeding as founders 34 or younger. In truth, the entrepreneurship boom is being fueled by older entrepreneurs, who often focus on services, complex technology and the business-to-business world, while young entrepreneurs are often leveraging fresh new technology for consumer offerings like iPhone apps and web services.

Yes, sometimes a more experienced employee requires a higher salary, but many older workers will accept salary cuts if there are other advantages, and they may be relying less on their paycheck than a younger counterpart so they are actually more flexible. Health benefit costs are higher for older workers, but older employees are also much less likely to have multiple dependents; studies show that the overall cost for benefits is a fairly consistent percentage of salary. Factor in that older workers take fewer sick days and have lower accident rates than other age groups, and that their loyalty means less turnover, saving recruiting and training costs, and it all evens out. Therefore, taking all of these considerations into account, it can be concluded that, in many cases, older workers are not any more expensive than any other age group.

Writing Prompt: Summarize the main points of the lecture showing how they contradict the main points in the reading passage.