

Myths About Older Workers

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The North Carolina Collaboration on Lifelong Learning and Engagement (NCCoLLE) is a partnership of libraries, library science educators, agencies on aging, and others interested in helping older adults remain active and engaged in their communities.

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Myth: Older workers are less productive

Reality: Older workers have a high level of productivity for several reasons. They often have highly developed writing and math skills and a lifetime of experiences to draw upon. Their maturity gives them stability and an improved ability to relate to others, and they waste less time. In addition, they are more flexible about working hours and often willing to work part-time.

Myth: Older workers are not motivated because they would prefer to retire soon

Reality: Many workers are in no rush to retire. An AARP study revealed that six in ten plan to work beyond their normal Social Security retirement age. There are many reasons to keep working, not all of them financial. Many older workers feel that staying active keeps them physically and mentally healthy. In particular, interacting with younger coworkers and the public "keeps you young." In 2007, 19% of those requesting services from state Job Link Career Centers were 50+.

Myth: Older workers are absent frequently due to health issues, or they face impairment in their jobs

Reality: Older workers value dependability and show lower rates of absenteeism compared to younger workers. They have a strong work ethic, value punctuality, and are less likely to need to stay home to care for sick children. Most are healthy themselves; 80% of those 55-64 and 66% of those 85+ rated their health as good or excellent in a CDC poll.

Myth: Older workers resist change and are unable to learn new skills

Reality: Older workers have been adapting to changing conditions all their lives. They are both willing and able to learn new skills, although they may learn at a little slower pace. For the 2006-2007 academic year, adults 50+ represented 7% of those enrolled in a degree or certificate program at NC community colleges and 24% of continuing education students. In total, more than 125,000 adults 50-64 and nearly 30,000 65+ were enrolled in community college during 2006-2007. Job skill enhancement was important; more than 66,000 older adults took occupational extension coursework in 2007. Nearly 5000 adults 65+ took a computer course that year.

Myth: Older workers cost more to employ

Reality: Older workers are less likely to job hop, and reduced turnover can reduce employer expenses. Many older workers have insurance from prior employers or from Medicare. Some may have retired from another career and receive a pension or other retirement income. Older employees may be willing to work for less pay and benefits to have a rewarding job with flexible hours, use of their skills, and opportunities to interact with others.

Source: www.aging.unc.edu/groups/work/forum2008/