

WORKING



AA598912

EDITOR: CHARLES FRANK 235-7370 FAX: 235-7358

WWW.WORKING.COM

SATURDAY, JUNE 16, 2007

Business lacks plan to retain older staff

Boomers eager, but on their terms

DEREK SANKEY
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

More companies are deploying strategies to retain older workers in the face of aging demographics and labour shortages, but it appears the vast majority of firms still have a long way to go in retaining and recruiting mature workers over 50.

Human resource experts say that with the first round of baby boomers turning 60 this year, and labour shortages already apparent in most sectors, younger workers and immigrants will not solve staffing challenges alone as boomers look for the door.

"There's been an awful lot of off-ramps to get the older worker out, but there's not a lot of on-ramps to encourage people to stay or to return (to the

workplace)," says Dianne Bond, market vice-president for Right Management in Calgary.

A recent Manpower survey showed that only 28 per cent of companies have a formal strategy in place to retain older workers past retirement age, while 18 per cent have a strategy to recruit older workers.

One positive indication is that the majority of boomers want to remain in the workforce, but it is going to require some innovative solutions to make them stay or return.

A Merrill Lynch report found 71 per cent of people over the age of 50 want to work in "retirement," while 38 per cent of those want to alternate between work and leisure. An additional 17 per cent are looking for part-time work only.

Considering there are about 11 million "mature workers" in a country with a population just over 32 million, according to Statistics Canada, it represents enormous potential to ease labour shortages, which became abundantly apparent in Alberta last year.



The majority of boomers want to remain in the workforce, but it is going to require some innovative solutions to make them stay or return, according to a recent Manpower survey.

Calgary Herald Archive

"Now, the problem is more in your face," says Bond.

When it comes to developing effective strategies, boomers and people over 50 are looking for some unique things in the type of work they're willing to take on.

A Right Management study found 40 per cent of those surveyed want flexible work schedules, 22 per cent want "enhanced health care," 17 per cent desire mentoring roles and 16 per cent look for leadership and professional development opportunities.

New models of work are being forged as contract, project-based and part-time work opportunities emerge to attract this group of mostly highly skilled, experienced workers.

IBM realized the potential to tap into the need for knowledge transfer systems and launched its BluePages corporate directory resource. It incorporates a searchable database with expert profiles within the company on any given topic, as well as e-mail and instant messaging capabilities, says Toronto-based spokeswoman Terry Lister from IBM Global Services.

Business leaders from IBM also saw the same internal demographic problems facing other companies and launched a retirees-on-call program for retired employees to work on a part-time or casual basis as needed.

The City of Calgary, meanwhile, also recently launched a

retiree pool of workers that is available on a defined, project basis to back up the regular workforce or in mentoring roles, says George McLaughlin, director of human resources.

Thirty-seven per cent of the city's workforce is eligible for retirement in the next five years, although 80 per cent expressed interest in working past retirement — "but on their own terms," says McLaughlin.

Jayne Border, program director for the free, government-sponsored organization Advantage 50 Plus Employment Services, says she is hearing from more professionals looking to remain in the workforce after so-called retirement.

"We're meeting them after they've left (for retirement),"



Ted Rhodes, Calgary Herald

"There's not a lot of on-ramps to encourage people to stay," says Dianne Bond of Right Management.

says Border. "We're seeing a lot more professionals — accountants, administration people."

The organization helps find placements for people over 50 looking to embark on new careers or return after finding retirement either isn't all they thought it would be, or that they don't have enough money to last another 20 or 30 years.

Myths and stereotypes still persist, however. "Myths that a lot of young people have that are hiring is that the older worker is coming to be the new supervisor or take over their job," says Border.

"There's also an assumption that older workers are going to miss more time or be a strain on benefits packages," she adds, noting that isn't necessarily true.

Bond predicts that companies will be forced to place more emphasis on this part of the solution to addressing labour shortages now and in coming years.

"It has really made companies understand they better look at a broader range of ways to deal with the shortages and it's not necessarily young people that are going to solve all the issues," Bond says.

DEREK.SANKEY@TELUS.NET