News You Can Use: Tips to Prepare Your Organization For An Older Workforce

People are living and working longer today than in the agricultural and industrial ages. The growth in the number and percentage of individuals over 60 and 80 years of age is already having a global impact.

From 1980 to 2017, the number of individuals over the age of 60 doubled to roughly 900 million. This segment of the world's population will double again by 2050 to nearly 2 billion, according to the 2017 *World Population Prospects* report by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

Risk professionals can prepare their organizations for the coming changes and opportunities of an older workforce with the following strategies:

1. **Customize a workplace safety program**. Organizations can utilize various levels and different methods of training to improve safety awareness. These include new hire training, annual mandatory compliance refreshers, on-the-job training, shadowing and formal mentoring programs, educational programs, and certifications.
2. **Update the education and onboarding process.**An important consideration is *how* different generations of employees learn, so specific training methods tailored to each generational group can be offered. Where online training modules may work for younger employees, older employees may prefer on-the-job or in-person training.
3. **Review training styles**. In addition to receiving ongoing training, older employees may feel more engaged if they are asked to teach newer or less experienced employees. Companies should begin focusing efforts on how to relate to and the best way to supervise older workers.
4. **Know a role's physical demands.**Employers need to ensure they have a good understanding of the actual physical demands of each job position in addition to the physical limitations of individual employees. Post-offer and pre-employment functional capacity exams are recommended for all age groups in industrial and manufacturing sectors.
5. **Consider the intersection of technology, comfort and well-being.**There are many low- and no-cost ideas that can make the workload more manageable for older employees. Standard workstations can be improved with ergonomics in mind. On-site clinics save time and are geared toward prevention as well as early disease detection. Investing in the health of all employees through wellness programs is a timeless and ageless benefit and will contribute to productivity and reduce costs.
6. **Promote an age-diverse business culture by recognizing and appreciating the skills/values of older workers.** There is a common misunderstanding and stereotype with older employees that they are less efficient than their younger co-workers. However, in 2016 the Organization for Economic Co-operation (OECD) found the working proficiency (in both literacy and numeracy) of older employees is actually not significantly lower than their

younger peers. In countries like the U.S., the proficiency of older workers is even at the same level as younger employees.

7. **Improve training against discrimination and negative attitudes to older workers on hiring, termination, compensation, and promotion.** As risk management professionals, it is important to remind your organizations to review and improve the policy against discrimination and negative attitudes to older employees, in order to mitigate the potential legal risk.

As the global working population continue to grow older, corporations around the world could expect to see more age discrimination litigations to come. Risk managers can play an important role by taking initiatives to help their organizations against discrimination and negative attitudes to older employees.

Several members of the RIMS International Council contributed to this article.

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