



Employers Wise to Find Value in Silent Generation Workers

By Cathleen Beetel

The current instability of the economy has affected nearly all Americans in varying degrees and the coming months will reveal just how extensive or minimal those repercussions will be. In particular, many of those who have retired or are near retirement age have found themselves with a smaller nest-egg to rely on than they initially thought and are considering a continuation of their current careers or re-entry into the workforce. While this trend presents some challenges to both employees and employers, it also creates the potential for increased learning among all generations and a more productive work environment.



As Manager of Recruitment Process Outsourcing at TAPFIN Process Solutions, I have worked with many companies of varying sizes and industries to help them strengthen their workforce and leverage the talents of each employee for the overall benefit of the organization. History and experience has demonstrated that any major fluctuation in the economic or social climate should affect how smart

employers pursue and maintain a strong workforce.

While employers should not necessarily go out of their way to meet the particular demands or preferences of one particular generation of workers, they should recognize the assets each group brings with them and manage their employees so that these advantages are maximized. In recent years, the Millennials, also referred to as Generation Y, have been the focus of attention ranging from experts advising Fortune 500 companies on how to keep their young employees happy, to numerous articles detailing their impatient ambition and lack of loyalty to employers. We rarely hear about the older generation of Americans still in the workforce, fittingly referred to as the 'Silent Generation,' born between 1925 and 1945 (age 63-83 in 2008). Employers, particularly in today's environment, should strive to equally value these older workers and the important roles they can play in their organizations.

According to generationalist Ann Fishman, "Silents see themselves as vital and active people in the prime of life, about 15 years younger than their chronological age." It remains no surprise, then, that people over 65 are overlooking the economy and postponing retirement or entering a new field after retirement. In fact, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 1977 and 2007, the employment rate of people 65 and over increased 101 percent (far more than that of any other age group). That statistic is expected

to increase by another 8.5 percent from 2006 to 2010. In addition to supplementing their retirement income, some seniors simply seek post-career structure and stimulation, while others will continue to work for their family business until they are physically unable.

What employers should consider, particularly in anticipation of an increase in older job applicants due to the economy, is that this generation brings with it a host of advantages that only experience can instill. While these workers may not use Twitter or carry a BlackBerry, they do bring with them many years of experience and developed skills. They have survived previous economic instability, have learned to work with a range of personalities, and many have even developed specialty areas that can only be learned through hands-on training. The presence of seniors in the workplace creates the opportunity for mutual learning among employees – the younger workers can share their knowledge of technology and other innovations, while older workers can impart the wisdom of having "been through this before." The 'Silents' may not be as anxious for career advancement, new titles or regular salary increases, but instead may simply favor steady employment to increase their nest-egg.

Replacing older workers particularly as the Baby Boomer generation has moved toward and through retirement age, has surfaced as a significant challenge for employers. Some have found the need to hire not just one but two new workers to fill an open gap. Others have implemented training programs for older workers to impart their knowledge and skills before exiting the workplace. Having these would-be retirees remain in or return to the working world allows the employers to save some money on new hires and training programs, if only for the time being, as everyone works through the financial challenges.

So what about a 65+ retiree who is now faced with the need to re-enter into an already tight workforce? First, staying confident in one's own strengths is critical. Experience and



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significant accomplishments stand the test of time and show commitment and a strong work ethic. While the competition for dexterity in the latest online communication tools will be tough to keep up with in light of the Millennials whose lives are based on them, taking an inexpensive class will at least help familiarize older workers with the terms and procedures used in their industry. Also, for those not seeking a full-time position, it is becoming more and more common for employers to offer alternative work hours, the option to work from home and other options. Flexibility is of high importance to employees of various ages and backgrounds, from parents and care-takers to those who simply prefer not being in an office all day. It is no longer a distinction to further set the older generations apart.

As many members of the 'Silent Generation' seek ongoing or supplemental employment, organization executives are looking to keep their workforces balanced and productive in light of the current economy and its uncertain future. These two factors can work together to benefit both groups, enabling older workers to exist in a work environment where they

are valued and respected for their experience and allowing companies to benefit further from these time-honed skills. Wise employers will see this trend for the advantage it is, and the 'Silents' should be promoting – not hiding – their years of hard work and skill development.

Cathleen Beetel, Manager, Outsourced Recruiting Services, TAPFIN Process Solutions, a COMSYS Company, is an accomplished staffing professional working in companies ranging from start-up to Fortune 50. She has worked as a management consultant, a corporate recruiter, a contract recruiter and an agency recruiter, giving her broad exposure to a variety of environments, industries and recruiting needs. She has filled positions at multiple levels across multiple lines of business, including finance, engineering, information technology, telecommunications and administration. Cathleen can be reached at 484-410-5797 or via email at cbeetel@tapfin.com.

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