

## Untapped: Engaging Older Workers in Your Organization

Pat Spadafora

A historic milestone was reached in Canada in 2016 when adults 65+ outnumbered children under 14 (Statistics Canada, 2016). This demographic shift and its far-reaching impact will continue to dominate the social, educational, cultural, political and economic landscape in Canada for the foreseeable future.

Statistics Canada (2019) states that from 1996-2018, the proportion of workers in Canada aged 55+ increased from 10% to 21% of the workforce. This trend is driven by factors such as longer life expectancy, improved health and financial needs. In addition, the ratio of older (55+) workers to younger (25-34) workers is near parity (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – CCOHS - website).

The poster below, shared with permission from CCHOS, offers a snapshot of the increase in Canada's older workforce and 'busts a few myths' about older workers (Did You Know?!). Additional insights and examples were shared in a recent webinar convened by the OACAO that focused on engaging older workers. The workshop presentation also included information about what older adults are looking for in employment (e.g. opportunities for learning and growth) and what they contribute to the workforce (e.g. problem-solving and decision-making)

# Canada's Aging Workforce

**Older workers in Canada nearly tripled in number from 1996 to 2018,** bringing the ratio of older (55 and over) to younger (25 to 34) workers near parity. (StatsCan, 2018)

**68.2% of people aged 55 to 64** were working in October 2021. (StatsCan, 2021)

### Older workers tend to have:

- ✓ Depth of experience
- ✓ Less need for supervision
- ✓ Lower absenteeism
- ✓ Lower turnover
- ✓ Emotional maturity

### A safe workplace benefits all workers

- Consider improvements such as mechanical assets, workstation design, handrails/grips, adequate lighting
- Offer flexible work options like part-time or hybrid arrangements
- Develop safe work procedures
- Promote active living, healthy eating, stress management, and work-life balance initiatives

### Training tips

- Incorporate past experience
- Provide context for information
- Allow more practice and classroom training for new situations
- Use short, active, clearly written procedures
- Group equipment or tasks with similar functions

### Did you know?

- Older workers tend to be loyal and are less likely to change jobs as frequently
- Age does not determine curiosity or capacity to learn
- Older workers suffer fewer job-related injuries, although injuries may be more severe
- Many workers, regardless of age, enjoy new technology

**A well-designed workplace benefits everyone.** Workers of all ages are more likely to remain in workplaces that prioritize their safety and well-being.

**CCOHS.ca**  
Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

Despite their growing numbers, older workers are frequently undervalued with little attention given to recruiting, training and retaining them in the workplace and to leveraging their skills and experience. While multigenerational teams and age diversity remains an aspiration, the emphasis of our recent webinar was older workers.

Washington based demographic strategist, Bradley Schurman, is the author of an important book for our times, *'The Super Age: Decoding Our Demographic Destiny'*. During the fall of 2023 and the winter/spring of 2024, Bradley offered two keynote presentations and facilitated one fireside chat, for Humber Polytechnic. All three focused, in one way or another, on the changing world of work and the benefits of leveraging the skills and talents of older workers. If readers are interested in an overview of these shifts in the workplace, these three events were recorded and are available on Humber's Aging in Community Education and Research (ACER) hub Available at this link: <https://www.agingincommunity.ca/video>

Additional resources include:

**Age-friendly workplaces: promoting older worker participation**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors-forum-federal-provincial-territorial/older-worker-participation.html>

**Age is Now a Strategic Imperative: An Employers Guide to Engaging Older**

**Workers:** This guide from the Encore Network (U.S.) offers practical advice on recruiting, retaining and engaging older workers. It covers topics such as flexible work arrangements, mentorship programs, and age-friendly workplace cultures.

<https://encorenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/edd/2023/05/Age-Friendly-Employers-Guide-final.pdf>

**Centre for Aging Better (Age Positive Campaign):** This UK government initiative promotes the benefits of an age-diverse workforce and provides resources for employers to create age-friendly workplaces. A general resource with lots of good tips!

<https://ageing-better.org.uk/>

**How Can Leaders Attract and Retain Older Workers?**

Sally Percy, U.K. based leadership and management journalist, October 22, 2024

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/sallypercy/2024/10/22/how-can-leaders-attract-and-retain-older-workers/>

If you would like additional resources about engaging and retaining older workers, please contact Pat Spadafora at [pat@kaleidoscopeconsulting.net](mailto:pat@kaleidoscopeconsulting.net).

