

‘Careering Beyond 50’

These days, the old belief that once established in a career, people maintain their position until they retire, is no longer relevant. Even in the traditional professions of teaching, medicine and law, people are retraining and re-inventing their careers. The old concept of retirement is also a redundant concept. We have a whole different environment to that which once provided predictable transitions for people as they reached 60 or 65 years. Through changing personal circumstances many people now envisage working on into their 70s.

The downturn in the economy notwithstanding, most organisations have realised that they need to retain their older workers. However, many do not have the processes in place to support their older employee’s changing needs.

For most employees in New Zealand, aging is difficult. If they have not developed a proactive approach to managing their career changes and are not self-aware, older employees are likely to be marginalised or quietly sidelined. Sadly, many people in this situation are susceptible to external pressures pushing them to make unwelcome changes or to exit.

As we age it is critical that we acknowledge changing needs and changing values, and then co-create situations that serve us in collaboration with our employers. Failure to do so can cause withdrawal, ‘stuckness’ and imbalance; all of which have negative consequences. Limiting beliefs, patterns and motivations come home to roost as if the universe is telling us to “Grow up”!

Employing organisations will do well to recognise the valuable knowledge held by their long-serving employees and nurture its benefit to the organisation by supporting aging employees to make these developmental transitions. It is important to know, demographically, where the organisation’s retiring edge is in order to mitigate loss of knowledge to the business and enabling older employees to exit gradually and with dignity.

Recently I facilitated The Aging Workforce Focus group sessions for the Counties Manukau and Waitamata DHBs to find out what their older employees needed in order to feel supported to continue on in their work longer. Among the recommendations were for the DHB’s to explore:

Flexible working options; implementation of phased retirement and succession planning; development and implementation of compulsory manager training on how to manage the older worker; that every person over the age of 60 engage a retirement planning consultation; cultivation of a culture of mentoring and passing on of knowledge; and encouragement of physical activity programmes.

The DHB’s are serious about supporting their older workers. They have an aging workforce and an aging population to serve, which makes their motivation to retain older workers important. Although most other organisations are struggling to retain their staff due to a downturn in the economy it is still very important to consider ways to reduce the impact on the business from the loss of valuable organisational knowledge and expertise. Equally, with sensitive support and guidance, many older employees may welcome support to help them transition into improved career situations which give them flexibility, balance and a sense of contribution.

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