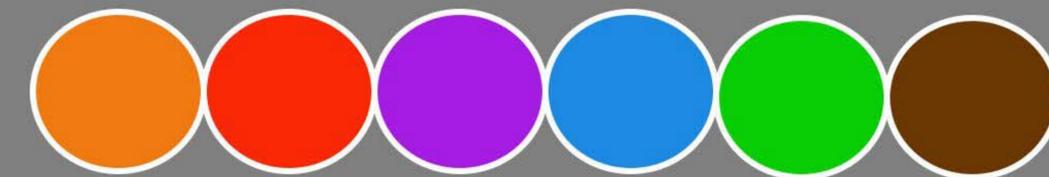


Designing the Age Friendly Workplace: An Action Plan Workshop



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ABSTRACT

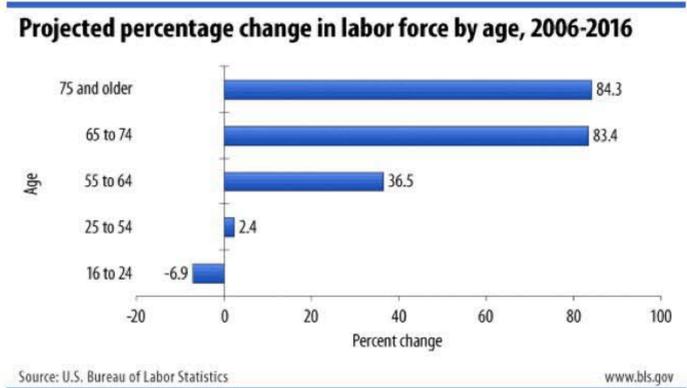
The workforce is aging. Employers, unions and other organizations need to take deliberate steps to ensure safety, health and competitiveness. However, survey data consistently find that while most employers are aware of this demographic shift and the kinds of actions that need to be taken, very few have actually implemented the necessary changes. To help fill this gap, the University of Washington and the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries have developed a workshop that helps organizations design age-friendly workplaces. Organizations that prepare will realize the benefits of an older workforce. And by making relevant changes, they will sustain the health, safety and productivity of all workers.

The workshop, which occurs over one or two days, is divided into seven modules. Initially, workshop participants are introduced to the issues that arise as a workforce ages. Then, with the guidance of the workshop instructor, participants select the strategies that will begin to make their organizations more age friendly. By the time they leave the workshop, participants have crafted action plans with measurable goals and implementation strategies.

The workshop will be implemented through a train-the-trainer program in the upcoming months. In order to account for some of the differences between general industry and the construction industry, two versions of the workshop have been developed - one for each. Representatives from industry and labor advised the development of the workshop to ensure that the strategies it recommends are practical and realistic.



THE AGING WORKFORCE



While many members of the “baby boomer” generation will retire in the upcoming decades, many others will keep working well into their sixties, seventies and beyond. Some of the common changes that occur with age, like increased skill and experience, will likely benefit organizations that employ older workers. Meanwhile, some of the physical, cognitive and social changes associated with age will present significant challenges for both employers and employees, most notably in the areas of health, safety, productivity and business sustainability.

Factors Associated With Aging				
Physical & Cognitive		Job Related	Safety & Health	Social
Vision	Hearing	Skills	Injury & Fatality Rates	Family Care Giving
Balance	Strength	Experience	Chronic Diseases	Pension Security
Reaction Time	Short-term memory	Institutional Knowledge	Recovery Time	Age Discrimination

SENSIBLE STRATEGIES

By paying attention to factors commonly associated with the aging process, organizations can design **age friendly workplaces** that ensure health, safety and productivity for workers of all ages. Research indicates that work ability can be maintained and even improved throughout the aging process¹.

Finnish researchers have identified four areas that can influence whether employees’ work ability is preserved with age. In this action-oriented workshop, we suggest strategies that address age-related issues in each one of these action areas. Workshop participants select strategies that they will implement into their organization once the workshop is completed.



Action Areas	The Work Environment	Work/Life Balance
	Ergonomics Universal Design Fall Protection (construction)	
	Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Covering Preventive Services Offering Smoking Cessation Programs	
	Work Arrangements Phased Retirement Flexible Work Options Telecommuting	
	Social Support Life-Long Learning Access to Public Transportation Family Care Services In Community	

Action Area	What	Who	When	How	Challenges	Next Steps
The Work Environment						
The Individual						
Work/Life Balance - Work Arrangements - Community Support						

ACTION PLAN

Despite the predictable demographic shift, few employers have taken action to prepare for an aging workforce. The primary goal of this workshop is to help employers take the first step from simply being aware to being prepared. Using a business planning tool called the Breakthrough Strategy², participants choose which strategies, or action items, their organization will use to prepare for an aging workforce. In developing their action plans, workshop participants determine what needs to be done within their organization to achieve the objectives they have set.

Action Area	Example Action Items
The Work Environment	Reduce back injuries by 25% with a “zero lift” policy
Health Promotion and Disease Prevention	Reduce the prevalence of smoking among workers by 15% by offering a smoking cessation program to interested employees
Work arrangements & work-life balance	Develop a phased retirement program to help older workers gradually ease into retirement.
Community Social support	Enroll 30 employees in community-based retirement planning classes, and split the cost



THE WORKSHOP

Format: The workshop is divided into seven modules that together cover the issues that arise as a workforce ages and strategies that can help organizations prepare. Instructors work with participants to develop an **action plan**, tailored to their organization, that will design their workplace to be more age friendly.

Duration of the Workshop: 2 days

Ideal Audience: A group of managers, executives and employee representatives from various departments within a single organization (health & safety, human resources, labor relations, etc.).

Outcome of the Workshop: An action plan that begins to make the host organization’s workplace more age friendly. The action plan will have:

- a measurable objective for each action area
- a timeline for completion
- assignments for individuals within the organization
- a list of “next steps” for once the workshop is over

Industries Covered: General Industry, Construction

TRAIN-THE-TRAINER

A “train the trainer” course has been developed to prepare a group of individuals who will deliver the workshop to employers and unions throughout Washington State.

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