

KENTUCKY SHRMSM

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The Missing Link: Measuring and Managing Financial Performance of the Human Capital Investment Certification and Advanced Degrees: Are They Worth It?



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Kentucky SHRM · Damian J. Wirth, SPHR · PR Director
 damian_wirth@fbtco.com

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Editor · Adam Greulich

Branch Manager ·

Trevilyn Blakeslee

Toll Free: (877) 234-1863 ext. 6701

Admin Assistant · Dottie Hunt

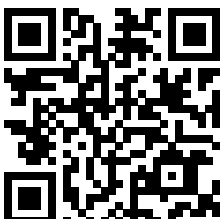
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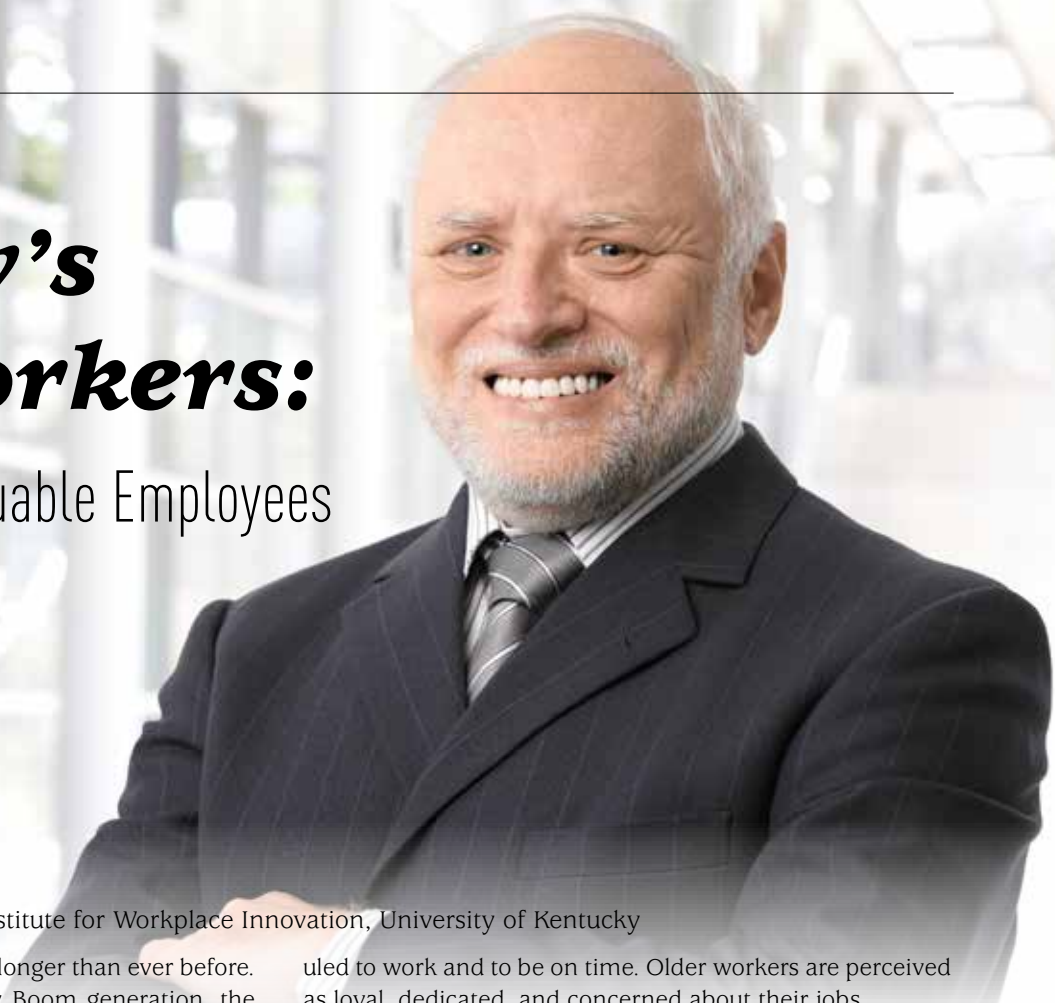
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Kentucky's Older Workers:

Benefits of These Valuable Employees



By Meredith Wells-Lepley, PhD, Institute for Workplace Innovation, University of Kentucky

Today, individuals are working longer than ever before. Due to the aging of the Baby Boom generation, the increase in life expectancy, and the poor economy, individuals are working longer than ever before. Currently less than half of sixty-five-year-olds are fully retired, and many have no intention of ever fully retiring. Unfortunately, age discrimination exists, and many older workers are either unemployed or underemployed.

The Institute for Workplace Innovation recently completed a study on Kentucky's aging workforce, funded in part by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, that examined Kentucky employers' attitudes toward older workers, those employees ages 50 years or older. Using a survey and ten focus groups, the study examined Kentucky employers' perceptions of older workers. Participants consisted of eighty-three representatives from Kentucky employers within ten industries ranging from hospitality to defense.

The study revealed that Kentucky employers have a very positive attitude toward older workers. A full 79% claimed to have a very or somewhat positive attitude toward older workers, whereas only 3% had a very or somewhat negative attitude, and only 10% said they were reluctant to hire older workers. So why do Kentucky employers like older workers?


Kentucky employers believe older workers bring many benefits to the workplace. The number one reason older workers are valued is reliability and dependability. In the survey, 100% of respondents stated that older workers are reliable. Employers commented that they can depend upon older employees to show up to work when they are sched-

uled to work and to be on time. Older workers are perceived as loyal, dedicated, and concerned about their jobs.

In addition, 97% stated that older workers have a good work ethic. Older workers were generally considered to be more loyal, more committed, more conscientious, and harder workers than younger workers. Some used sick-day usage as an example of that commitment and explained that older workers are far less likely to abuse the sick-day policy than younger workers are. "If older workers don't have health issues, they may not use all their paid time off, whereas the younger ones use it all."

Most survey participants claimed that older workers are experienced (93%), are strong performers (76%), have low turnover (76%), are good mentors (66%), and enhance customer satisfaction (62%). Participants from hospitality, retail, and finance were particularly impressed with the customer service skills of older workers.

Overall, many organizations said they could not do without older workers. One survey participant summed up nearly all the reported benefits of older worker with one comment:

We find that older workers appreciate their jobs more, take pride in their work, and that they still want to feel vital to the workplace. . . . They are more dependable, they complain less, their attitudes are great, and they are here because they want to be and not just because life dictates that they have to have an income. They are the vital pulse of our business. 

Meredith Wells-Lepley, PhD is Acting Director of UK's Institute for Workplace Innovation (iwin). To learn more about older workers, visit www.iwin.uky.edu.