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EDITORIAL

Here's a burning issue that requires our immediate consideration and action: the integration of older workers.

After several years of discussing which management philosophy a company should adopt in order to integrate, motivate and attract new generations, we are now faced with a new reality.

Do companies now have to make room for older workers? Do we appreciate them at their true worth? Do we give them the recognition that they deserve? Should we hold a special place for them?

These are just some of the questions that need to be addressed in a context where companies will need to innovate to face acute labour shortages in the future.

I therefore invite you to read our e-bulletin. Though not a proper debate, it can still help initiate discussions on the issue.

I wish you a pleasant read and invite you to come and see us!

Isabelle Côté, President

YOUNG RETIREE OR PRIVILEGED EMPLOYEE?

Everyone can recall the workers' creed from the 90s: Freedom 55... And, honestly, most of us appreciate the idea of being entirely free to choose what we want to do with our life at 55! Travels, rest, and dreams that become reality... What more could we ask for? And yet a growing number of workers are postponing their retirement until even later, some by choice because they enjoy what they do and have the feeling that they can still contribute, while others are compelled to do so because of the economic situation. Regardless of the reasons that explain this new generation of workers, we can no longer ignore its presence on the job market. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, **fewer and fewer workers say they are retired**. Moreover, again based on this official source, barely one third of baby-boomers who have reached the expected retirement age have actually retired. Since we aren't yet familiar with this phenomenon, many questions remain: what is the real job market like for this new category of workers, what are the characteristics of these older workers that can be to a company's advantage, what can an employer do to make room for them.

Who makes up this category of workers?

Included in this category are 55+ workers, those who in theory could put into practice the Freedom 55 philosophy, but who remain on the job market. Consistent with demographic problems in Québec and Canada, this category of workers represented the largest generational group of workers in 2006 with nearly 4 million people and an annual growth 5 times greater than that of the general population.

What is the actual job market like for this new category of workers?

Without disregard for the importance of other workers, there are still too many companies that infinitely prefer young workers, though they often require more investment in training

and more flexibility in their work schedule. **And so, in the current situation, older workers compete with new applicants and must constantly prove that they can do the same job and bring the same value-add to the company.** The employers' reaction is understandable since they want to open their doors to new workers in order to offset the eventual labour shortages that are liable to befall us as early as 2012. The recommended strategy is therefore not to count too much on older workers who could retire sooner, maybe even during the crisis, leaving companies in the lurch.

Interestingly, older workers are still not highly regarded in our society, not that their work is not appreciated, but because they often reach a ceiling where responsibilities are limited and promotions are rare.

They are looking for a way to prove themselves and pursue their move up the career ladder. **We don't make their lives easier, because very often we don't always recognize the strength and the assets that they bring to the company.**

What are the characteristics of these older workers?

There are many preconceived ideas about these workers: they cost companies more in insurance and health care; they are less techno-savvy; and they are resistant to change.

We can't really deny that they cost more in insurance, particularly if they have life insurance or disability insurance. On the other hand, this category of workers represents the **most present and most flexible workers**, because their family obligations have usually decreased significantly compared to those of workers in their early thirties. These advantages are not to be sneezed at.

As well, it's incorrect to think that older workers will hinder companies' modernization. It's quite the opposite. **Baby-**



A few tips for older workers who respond to a job posting:

Use the right words: relevant experience rather than extensive experience...

Insist, if need be, on your ability to share your experience and even your wish to share it in order to demonstrate that you don't compete with younger workers.

In your personal profile, highlight your curiosity and open-mindedness so that it is clear that you are not resistant to change.

As well, list your computer skills to show that you are comfortable with technology.

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boomers have seen just about every phase of technological progress—from colour television to the Internet. Most often, they are even recognized for their eagerness to learn about technology, and **if you draw on their experience, they could even help reassure their colleagues about major changes within the company** by sharing their experience of the various stages of change that they themselves have gone through.

So don't take these workers for granted. Though they come from a generation that is more loyal to their employers, current trends suggest that they are more and more in sync with the job turnover rate of this millennium. According to Statistics Canada, their quit rate is comparable to that of the younger generation... and we're not talking about the retirement rate. It is therefore important to be well aware of these workers' characteristics in order to fully appreciate their worth and especially to succeed in keeping them as employees.

How to go about making special room for them within your company?

- **Focus on ongoing training** to keep them motivated and so that they don't become resistant to change or technology, and especially so that they don't feel out of their depth.
- **Provide them with various opportunities to be creative and challenged.** For example, make them mentors or coaches for specific projects or induction programmes for new employees so that they can share their experience and feel appreciated.
- **Turn to them often for advice** during committee meetings or consultations **and avoid giving them the impression that they are competing with a younger generation of workers.**
- **Build your reputation as an employer who appreciates this generation of workers,** not only by retaining older employees, but also by including them in

your hiring process and by implementing measures to value this category of workers.

- **Rethink your insurance programmes:** an increasing number of older workers are drawn to part-time jobs; if this is not possible within your company, you may want to consider progressive retirement.

On the other hand, even if more and more companies are turning to this category of workers, it isn't yet the norm and there is still a lot to be done. In fact, the recent survey Aging Populations and the Workforce: Challenges for Employers to which refers Statistics Canada reveals that **only 4% of employers had no objections against hiring older workers.**

Over the past few weeks, we've heard both Lucien Bouchard and Claude Castonguay express their opinion on retirement and on the fact that it should be postponed for several years. Whether we agree or not with these public figures, we can't ignore the fact that Québec has increasingly fewer reserves to support retirees. **Therefore, we should be realistic and replace the Freedom 55 ideology.** Since this will soon be a reality and the decision will need to be made by a large majority of Québec workers, this will have a substantial impact on their employers. It is thus important for companies to soon begin discussing the place given to older workers and their recognition in the workplace, as well as to provide incentives to retain them or attract them and encourage them to adopt the ideology of a slightly longer career.

TECHNO-ADDICT

BlackBerry, iPhone, teleworking, virtual advertising...

Technology is invasive and sometimes overwhelms us. But does all that technology really help us get closer to one another or be more efficient or, on the contrary, does it put up barriers or add complications that didn't exist before?

What are employees, employers, and clients' technological limits or requirements?

And especially to what extent are we dependent on the technology around us and what importance should it have in the workplace?

We will discuss these critical issues in our next edition to be published in June.