

OUR VIEW

WORKPLACES MUST ADAPT TO AGING WORK FORCE

People 65 and older will increasingly try to stay employed or find employment for a number of reasons.

Some will feel a need to do it for financial reasons. Others will stay working because it fulfills them more than full retirement.

Despite that fact and despite a coming work force shortage, too many businesses report they have no real plans in place to retain and recruit older workers.

That's one reason Greater Mankato Growth and Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation have teamed up to create the ENCORE 60+ initiative to get local businesses and non-profits to brainstorm about ways to better tap older people.

In the next 25 years, the number of Minnesotans over age 65 will double, rising to 1.4 million, and by 2030, older people will represent more than 20 percent of the state's population. Meanwhile, the number of younger people available to employers will be smaller and will not keep up with the number of retirements.

Still, leaders of many companies continue to be wedded to stereotypes. One survey of hundreds of human resource directors showed more than half believed older people are sicker, slower, more expensive to employ, less adaptable and have obsolete skills.

Businesses that have successful strategies cite a few keys for recruiting and retaining older workers. Flexibility is a must. And that doesn't just mean flextime. Many retirees who would work part-time will still go south for the winter or want time off for other pursuits.

Some companies retain their most experienced older employees by allowing them to ratchet back their hours — and pay — to serve as mentors and coaches for younger company leaders or to work on special projects.

Adapting the workplace to accommodate physiological changes and creating training designed for older workers is also important.

Keeping and recruiting older workers will take a smorgasbord of tools, but it is a process that will position businesses to thrive in times of a shrinking and less experienced workforce.

The ENCORE 60+ group will be holding a town meeting from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Oct. 27 at the civic center.

(greatermankato.com/community-encore.php.) It's a good starting point for area business and civic leaders to find better ways to exploit the wealth of work, community and life experiences of older population.

The Issue

The work force in Minnesota is going to get older, and businesses would be wise to prepare.