

Bring Baby Boomers Back

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The Baby Boom generation has pretty much seen it all in the workplace over the past four decades. Most members of this generation possess a breadth of experience coupled with a depth of wisdom about their industry, employer and job. That said, many have become less than fully engaged over the years for several reasons:

The sense of repetition or lack of challenge in their jobs.

The increasing emphasis within most organizations to do more with less which has resulted in a sense of being overwhelmed and overworked.

The lack of job security that has become so apparent in recent years.

A pre-occupation with family and other commitments outside of work as they age.

It is becoming apparent, however, that many of these veteran workers plan to remain in the workforce past what society has understood to be the age of retirement. It is conceivable that millions within the Baby Boom generation will be working in some capacity well into their seventies. Over time, this phenomenon will complicate organizational challenges including succession planning, compensation, training, hiring, and employee retention. Therefore, it is paramount that sandwich managers keep these workplace veterans engaged in their work and with those around them. There are a number of ways in which this can be accomplished. **Begin by taking stock of those who have been with the organization for a considerable time.** What skills and insights do they have that are not readily apparent in the everyday workplace? What special certifications and awards have they achieved? Where do they really shine? In what ways do they contribute to the field, perhaps through trade associations, research or writing? **Next, consider ways to better integrate these skills and interests in the functions of the department.** After all, evidence of these accomplishments certainly demonstrates past investment by the individual involved. How can you marry their interests with current projects and assignments? **Meet with them individually.** Ask about ideas they have that would put their time and interests to better use. More than one organization has instituted allowances for "special project release time" in which the individual is given up to four hours per week to work on a project that is not directly related to his or her daily responsibilities, but will benefit the overall organization and field. **Introduce opportunities for mentoring.** While some informal mentoring is sure to be going on already, it is helpful to encourage it more officially. Mentoring provides veteran contributors with the chance to share some knowledge and connect with their younger counterparts. Of course, effective mentoring takes more effort and design than simply assigning one contributor to another. Each relationship takes time to evolve and many of these relationships are not long term in nature. Rather than forcing the process, most managers have found that simply soliciting interest from veteran contributors and letting everyone know who is open to these kinds of relationships is

the most effective way to proceed. **Use veteran contributors as a part of the recruiting process.** Given the depth of knowledge and perspective they have about the industry and the organization, there is a lot they can share. It is important to coach them on how to deliver the information. A long-time contributor who begins his presentation with the words, "I remember when . . ." might very well turn off the young people you are attempting to attract. At the same, this individual is a living example of someone who has thrived within the organization and industry and can certainly answer questions his younger colleagues cannot. Actively pursuing these kinds of opportunities accomplishes several goals. It serves to re-engage veteran contributors in the workplace. It increases overall productivity within your team and expands the creative horizons of younger contributors. Additionally, it assists in the transfer of the knowledge base possessed by these veteran contributors and fosters more opportunities for communication between the generations. **Finally, take the time to publicly recognize the contributions your veterans have made to the organization over the years.** While you don't want to appear to be patronizing them, everyone enjoys a sincere pat on the back now and then. Besides, it is a great way to remind your younger folks about the skill and experience these people possess.

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