

# HR to engage senior employees: Lifelong training benefits have no age limit

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When was the last time you had a detailed training plan discussion with your employees?

If your staff are over 50 it's likely been a long time.

Despite espousing a commitment to lifelong learning, Canada's corporations have a dirty secret. Professional development and training programs typically ignore anyone over the age of 48. Employees can request training courses but there the formal focus drops off as employees age.

As working life expectancy continues to increase, this short sighted view of the "development window" is damaging. Employees often receive no significant training or skill development for the last 10-15 years of their career.

Is it no wonder employee engagement among this population is problematic? Or why there is a false perception that older employees cannot learn new technical systems or tools?

Skills aside, what message does this lack of investment convey to the employees that are the most instrumental in setting the cultural tone of your organization?

When mid-level and senior managers are disengaged the effect is felt through their entire team. By stopping employee development based on age, companies send the message that older employees are no longer considered vibrant members of the organization — that expectations have changed and it is ok for them to be out of date.

It is not ok. In fact, it is bad for business.

Canadians are delaying their retirements for a variety of reasons. Employees are going to remain in your workforce through their 60s, into their 70s and beyond. If your most experienced employees are your mentors, doesn't it make sense that they stay up to date with current trends so they can spot competitive opportunities as they emerge?

Here are three tips to reinstate lifelong learning in your organization:

**1. Get the facts** . Review the training records of your staff who are over the age of 50. When was the last time they updated their career development plan and attended skill-building training? Set a goal to update training plans by a certain date.

**2. Reverse the trend.** Don't minimize the importance of a career development plan, even if your older employees seem disinterested in the discussion. Employees often feel that it is inappropriate to discuss career aspirations and training when they are past a certain age – a message they have received from the organization. As a manager this is an area where you need to lead and be the first one to take a risk. Find ways to explore how training can lead to mutual benefit. Get support if you are not sure how to start this conversation.

**3. Be creative.** Training does not always mean sitting in a course. On the job learning and self-study are a part of many organization's approaches to development. If you are looking at these employees to lead, mentor, transfer knowledge and identify opportunities, how are their associated skills being fostered and encouraged? Explore experiential learning programs that present the opportunity for employees to apply their knowledge in new situations.

Career planning, training and development and talent management applies to employees of all ages. There is a significant return on investment to ensuring all staff are engaged, up to date and informed about your marketplace. People in their 50s and 60s are changing jobs and careers. They are staying in the workplace. This period can be one of languishing, where employee and employer alike are waiting until it is time to leave.

Or, it can be a time of great intrapreneurship, leadership and mentoring the leads your company to gain competitive advantages by fostering a thriving workforce.