

Two Issues around the Diversity of Aging: In the Workplace and Intersection with LGBT

By Stan Kimer

9/9/13



Expert Forum



Contents: *Introduction, Mature people in the workforce, Intersection with LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) diversity.*

At a recent Sunday church service I recently attended, “Miss Mildred,” a 93 year-old woman was very slowly assisted to the keyboard and played two hymns that the congregation sang.

After the songs, the pastor remarked how so often society simply discards or disregards our older citizens, even when they still have gifts and talents to share with us. Miss Mildred did a wonderful job of playing and she simply glowed as she enjoyed ministering to us through her musical talent.

One very intriguing interesting dynamic in the United States, most European countries and Japan is the very fast growing percentage of the older population. Two of the main contributing factors in these regions of the world are the declining birthrate and the improved health care and lifestyle choices leading to longer lives. Shouldn’t we as individuals, companies and societies seek to see the value and treat with dignity the aging adults in our communities?

Mature people in the workforce. For the first time in history, as mature workers stay on the job longer, there are four generations in the work place. In 2002, 14% of the workforce was 55 and older, in 2012 that rose to 19%! While there is now a decrease in the workforce aged 24 – 44, the highest growth rate is among 45 – 54 year olds. Over 50% of workers 45 – 70 years old state that they plan to work into their 70s. An article in the May 2013 of the the May SHRM (Society of Human Resource Mgt) HR magazine highlighted the growing trend of women to work well into their 60s and beyond.

Now that there is a smaller pipeline of new talent coming into the workforce, many companies are facing shortages of critical skills. Perhaps the answer is better utilization of mature worker as we address two questions:

1. Are the talents and expertise of older employees being fully leveraged?
2. Are companies building the required pipeline of new leaders as older employees retire?

In terms of fully leveraging the talents and expertise of older, experienced employees, here are some ideas:

- Now with the four generations of workers on the job, are you providing solid training so that the diverse groups can work together in a respectful and productive way?
- Are you introducing innovative programs for mature employees such as part time work as a bridge to full retirement?

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AARP (An Ally for Real Possibilities) provides a [wide range of resources \(link\)](#) for the experienced worker.

The current experienced workforce is now one of the largest segments in the USA due to the increased birthrate from 1945 – 1964. This generation, often referred to as “baby boomers” are retiring in increasing rates and many companies are experiencing a critical talent shortage. Ideas for addressing the need to grow a leadership talent pipeline include:

- Having a robust programs in place to engage younger employees in meaningful career development and growth. Total Engagement Consulting by Kimer offers an innovative program using career maps of successful professionals to provide ideas and guidance to all employees. You can read this [recent online article](#) about this unique process.
- Taking full advantage of senior employees by asking them to mentor junior employees. This can be a great way to foster institutional knowledge transfer and to make the senior employees feel good about their work and accomplishments.
- Including leadership elements in your diversity programs so that your future leadership pipeline is as broad as possible and includes a full mix of gender, race, LGBT and other aspects of diversity.

Proper treatment and leveraging of the aging worker population can indeed be built into a business advantage instead of becoming a major issue!

Intersection with LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) diversity. Since LGBT diversity is my deepest area of expertise, I always like to focus on the unique perspective and intersection of LGBT diversity with other diversity areas.

I appreciate the work of [SAGE \(Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders\)](#) which provided many of the below points. First, some general facts about the aging LGBT population:

1. It is increasing rapidly and with the shift in culture as more older LGBT people are “coming out.” Recent estimates suggest that there are over 1.5M LGBT people over 65 in the USA and that will double by the year 2030.
2. A higher percentage of LGBT elders face financial hardships due to job benefit and social security inequities, and fewer family members to help care for them.
3. LGBT elders deal with a significantly higher rate of mental and physical health disparities. 39% of LGBT elders have contemplated suicide and 53% feel isolated from others (over double the general population)
4. Many LGBT elderly people face discrimination and stigma in the lives for our

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country's systems that support the aging.

Many of these issues are even amplified for the aging transgender population. Many of these issues arise from the fact that many of today's aging services providers are ill-equipped to provide competent and nondiscriminatory services to address the unique needs to transgender elders, and some health issues remain from barriers faced to receiving quality health care earlier in their life spans.

However, I see some encouraging signs that there is much more focus now on the intersection of aging and LGBT, and this emphasis must continue to develop. There are growing resources for LGBT elders and their allies through organizations such as:

- [SAGE \(link\)](#)– Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders. They also have many local chapters associated with local LGBT Centers.
- [AARP \(link\)](#) – An Ally for Real Possibilities. If you do a search on their website search engine on LGBT – you will find that they produce a large number of their resources for the LGBT constituency.

Additional hopeful signs I have seen recently include:

- The [Carol Woods Retirement Community](#) here in my own state of North Carolina, is a welcoming progressive community which even placed an ad recently in The Front Page, North Carolina's LGBT bi-weekly paper.
- There was a full page ad in a recent Gay and Lesbian Review (bi-monthly magazine) for [Fountaingrove Lodge](#), a new retirement community in California exclusively for the LGBT retirement community.
And I will close with a link to two more articles in the April 26 – May 9, 2013 issue of Qnotes (North Carolina's LGBT bi-weekly newspaper) – one titled "[Focus on LGBT Aging Grows](#)" and a second article focusing on the [LGBT Senior Housing](#) becoming a hot topic among advocates.