

# Working Life

## FIFTY-SOMETHING

**A**STD turns 50 this month. In honor of that occasion, we think it is only appropriate that this edition of WL focus on issues concerning workers who have reached and passed the half-century milestone.

### Keeps On Ticking

Think retirement age is 65? Think again.

Ninety-something George Burns is still working as a comedian and an actor. In fact, he has a date to perform at the Palladium in London on his 100th birthday.

Anne Durrum Robinson, an octogenarian, is busy writing human resource books, consulting, and giving creativity workshops. Based in Austin, Texas, she flies to speaking engagements all over the world, often wearing her favorite cowhand boots. She recently offered a colleague this birthday toast: "Turning 40 is nice. I ought to know; I've done it twice."

Fifty-ish Lauren Hutton is belying the notion that a model's career is over at age 30.

And there are many more, too numerous to mention.

### ROI: Return on Older Investment

Here's proof that older (we like "seasoned") workers are productive and cost-effective and can be trained in new skills.

The Commonwealth Fund, a private philanthropic organization in New York City, conducted case studies as part of its Americans Over 55 at Work program. The program aims to increase employment opportunities for older workers and to motivate employers to find ways to attract them. It also helps educational institutions provide continuous education and training to seniors.



The 1991 studies involved Days Inns of America; the Travelers Corporation; and B&Q, a British hardware chain. The findings help debunk some of the myths about senior workers—that they require extra training in new technologies, for example. In fact, the studies found that older workers learn to operate sophisticated computer software in the same amount of time—about two weeks—that younger workers require. In addition, older workers have less employee turnover and absenteeism.

Eight years ago, Days Inns began systematically hiring workers over age 50 as reservations agents in its Atlanta center, because it had difficulty recruiting younger people for the positions. Now, 26 percent of the workforce at the Atlanta center is age 50 and older. The motel chain's other locations also have begun hiring more seniors. A Days Inns manager says that the older agents tend to be especially good salespeople, booking more reservations

*George Burns, Lauren Hutton, and other active over-50s are living proof: It ain't over 'til it's over.*

than their younger counterparts.

Days Inns found that 87 percent of older workers stay on the job at least one year; only 30 percent of workers under 50 are on the job after one year. And because of low turnover, the recruitment and training costs for older workers are three times lower than for younger workers.

At Travelers, an internal job bank benefits both the company and its older workers. Travelers established the job bank for its own retirees, to provide a pool of workers for temporary assignments. Travelers saves money on agency fees, and retirees earn extra income. In addition, the job bank has improved employee morale among younger workers, who view it as an indication that the company is taking care of its own.

In an effort to improve customer service, the B&Q chain staffed an entire store with workers age 50 and older. Compared with the company's other branches, the "older-worker" store experienced 18 percent higher profits, a six-times-lower employee-turnover rate, 39 percent less absenteeism, and 59 percent less stock theft and damage.

Overall, the studies concluded that older workers are a good investment.

### Experience Pays

Workers between ages 58 and 62 who have been with Teledyne Wisconsin Motor for at least 30 years get an extra 20 days of paid vacation annually. Or, they can work those days and receive the extra money.

A Philadelphia company opened an office across the street from a retirement community, hired the residents to work the hours of their choice, and installed a traffic light to aid their commute.

*from Herman Associates, Rittman, Ohio*

### Tempting Older Workers

In the past two years, there has been nearly a 20 percent increase in the number of senior citizens returning to the workforce, according to a survey conducted by Snelling Personnel Services.

Respondents said they returned to work because they were bored or needed the money. Many are taking temporary jobs.

"Temp work provides seniors with

a great combination: flexibility and added income," says Robert Snelling, president of Snelling. The company says it finds that employers value the experience, reliability, dependability, and strong work ethic of senior job applicants.

### Benchmarking Mature Work Styles

Being older can be an advantage in the workplace. For instance, working women under 30 may have a credibility gap, says consultant Marilyn Moats Kennedy in *Glamour's* "Ask Marilyn" column.

Kennedy offers some tips for young women who wish to be taken seriously:

- ▶ Move with deliberation.
- ▶ In meetings, pause before making a point to signal its importance.
- ▶ Don't introduce an idea by saying you believe in it. Instead, cite its success in other instances.
- ▶ Never share personal information that might make you seem young and foolish.

Good advice for workers of any age.

### Price Per Pound

We've all heard the expressions: Fat and fifty. Middle-aged spread. And so on.

It doesn't have to be that way. But if it is, you can't be penalized in the workplace for avoirdupois, reports the *Wall Street Journal*. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has declared chronic obesity a protected category under the Americans With Disabilities Act, even in cases in which the complainants could diet and lose weight.

The EEOC has defined "obesity" as being twice the normal weight for one's height. Courts have the power to stray from EEOC's weight guideline. In a recent case, a 5-foot, 2-inch, 329-pound woman won a discrimination suit that claimed she'd been turned down for a position because of her weight. The case is being appealed.

Some overweight people find EEOC's ruling offensive, saying that they are healthy and not disabled. The National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, in Sacramento, says it would prefer that civil-rights laws be amended to protect overweight people from all kinds of discrimination.

### What Price Beauty?

How many times have you seen the phrases, "aging beauty" and "aging lothario"? They imply that attractiveness fades with age.

So? So, studies show that one's appearance can affect one's salary. People perceived as good-looking earn, on average, about 10 percent more than people who are viewed as not so good-looking, according to a study conducted by economists at the University of Texas and at Michigan State University.

In the study, participants rated a sample of working people as "attractive," "average-looking," or "ugly." The findings indicate that attractive people earn about 5 percent more than average-looking people; ugly people earn 5 percent less than people with average looks—education, experience, and other factors being equal.

The findings don't apply just to modeling or working with the public. The same results were found in jobs in which appearance would seem to play no role, such as factory work and telemarketing.

In another study, the starting salaries of M.B.A. graduates were correlated with their ratings on a one-to-five "attractiveness" scale. The ratings also were correlated with their salaries 10 years later. The starting and subsequent salaries of the men graduates corresponded positively with their attractiveness ratings; the more attractive ones got higher starting salaries. Among the women graduates, there was no relationship between their starting salaries and their ratings. But the women who were rated attractive had higher salaries 10 years later than those who were rated unattractive.

Go figure.

*from the Wall Street Journal*

*Next month, WL explores offbeat jobs and work subcultures.*

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