

The ageing workforce  
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The decade ahead will be shaped by an ageing workforce and people working longer. According to the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust the proportion of the workforce aged 55 years and over is likely to grow from about one in six in 2007 to around one in four by 2020. Population ageing will result in a dramatic slowdown in labour growth. The labour force is forecast to grow by only 15,000 per year after 2016, less than half the recent rate.

So what does that mean for your business? It would seem that we will be increasingly reliant on mature workers and will need age-friendly strategies to successfully staff businesses. Strategies employers can consider include:

- Identify the current age profile and retiring intentions of employees to assist with succession planning.
- Age-proof your organisation by identifying what you want to achieve, such as retention of skills and knowledge for competitive advantage.
- Encourage job applications from older workers and consider different forms of flexible work arrangements including shorter weeks, extended leave periods, quality part time work and phased retirement opportunities.
- Ensure job advertisements and job descriptions do not refer to age in either words or images and do not directly or indirectly discriminate against older workers
- Formally reviewing recruitment practices and attitudes of hiring managers towards the selection of mature workers.
- Commit at CEO and senior management level to ensure a business culture that values age and experience in the workforce
- Focus on performance not age to ensure employees have the skills, knowledge and motivation for the job and ensure your performance management system is flexible to cater for a diverse range of employees
- Address performance issues proactively as soon as possible to avoid hard conversations about poor or deteriorating performance and ensure all employees are treated fairly and with dignity
- Re-design jobs to reduce demands such as risk of injury or burnout while retaining experience and consider older employees for mentoring, pairing or “buddy” systems, quality control or trouble-shooting roles

New Zealand’s workforce is growing collectively older, and the country needs to not only to adjust itself to that fact but also to get ready to face skills shortages as the current active population retires, leaving some professions short of enough qualified people to do the work required. Therefore you need to remember that recruiting, retaining and engaging staff is critically important in an economic downturn, when people’s skills, intelligence and creativity really make a difference.