The Aging Workforce:

Have you considered the impacts of your aging employees and how to meet their needs?

Are you asking yourself these questions?

1. What age is your current workforce?
2. Will older aged individuals enter your workforce in the short term? What about the long term?
3. What are the key physical and cognitive characteristics for successful job / task execution (strength, vision, etc.)?
4. For each characteristic, what performance level is required? Does this match or exceed the expected job task requirements?
An Aging World…

Percentage of population age 65+

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

1 Every single day, 10,000 people turn 65 years old
• Started in 2011 and will continue through 2030

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The Aging Workforce

✓ In 1972, average age of a US worker was 28. Today it’s 46.
✓ The number of workers aged 45+ has doubled since 1950.
✓ According to the AARP, the number of people 55 years and older in the labor force was about 18.2 million in 2000 – and it is projected to rise to 32 million by 2025 (~76% increase).

1. Source Ergonomics ASSE Feb 2009 Vol 2, No2 – Dr. Ronald Porter, PT, CEAS. Director, Back School Atlanta. What Works with the Aging Workforce

Why Do Older Workers Work?

• Studies have shown that the majority (79%) of older workers plan to work past 65
• Attributed to:
  • Changes in Social Security retirement age
  • Maintaining healthcare benefits
  • Higher healthcare costs
  • Higher cost of living
  • Desire to stay active
  • Intellectual challenges of work
  • Committed to their jobs

Sources: Administration on Aging, BLS, Pew Research Center
Benefits of Older Workers

- Older workers more motivated to exceed expectations than younger workers (AARP, 2005)
- Older workers less likely to miss work
- Older workers are more productive through their experience quality and learned efficiencies
- Professionalism, loyalty, written communication skills, analytical skills, and business knowledge are higher in older adults (AARP, 2005)
- Much lower rate of injury with days away from work than younger generations (BLS, 2014a)

Health Changes As We Age….

- Gain Weight
- Arthritis
- High BP
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Heart Disease
- Menopausal & Post Menopausal Issues

✓ Maximal Strength
✓ Muscle Mass
✓ Bone density
✓ Visual and Auditory Acuity
✓ Fitness
✓ Aerobic Capacity
✓ Cognitive Speed/Function
Aging - Strength

- Strength of 65-year-old is 75-80% of that attained between ages of 20-30
- Decline in maximal muscle strength with age parallels the reduction in muscle mass
  - Review workstation design to minimize force requirements of task
  - Help control fatigue with job rotation or job enlargement
  - Encourage participation in wellness programs
  - Conditioning may improve muscular performance by increasing muscle strength

Aging - Workstation Changes

- Discs progressively dehydrate and lose capacity to withstand compressive forces during MMH activities.
  - Design using NIOSH and Liberty Mutual Guidelines to reduce risk across all ages
- Posture changes in response to aging changes should be minimized
  - Change text location and size to minimize neck extension due to wearing bifocals
  - Improve tools if postures are changed due to force required to complete task
**Aging - Aerobic/Cardiac Function**

- Lungs lose breathing capacity
- Resting heart rate slows and blood pressure increases
- Volume of blood pumped per minute decreases
- Elasticity of arteries & veins decrease

✓ Encourage engagement in wellness programs to maintain conditioning for the job and lower risk of underlying health conditions

**Aging - Sensory Perception - Vision**

**Visual Adaptation** – Lens thickens - darkness adaptation (amount) & transient adaptation (time) affected
- Minimize transitions from light to dark

**Contrast Sensitivity** - Need more light to offset shifts in contrast
- Need 2X the illumination by age 40
- Need 5-6X the illumination by age 60

**Chromatic Distortion** - Lens yellows reducing blue light transmission
- Use BRIGHT colors to compensate

(Verriest, Vandervyvere, and Vanderdonck as cited in Boyce (1981))

Cataracts, Glaucoma, and Macular Degeneration - Glare recovery and night vision worsen
Aging - Sensory Perception – Hearing

• **Presbycusis** is age-related hearing loss

• 33% of people >65 have hearing concerns
  
  ✓ Make signals and audible messages LOUDER and add visual signals
  
  ✓ Minimize background noise level if possible


Aging - Sensory Perception - Balance

• Balance is affected by inner ear, visual acuity, and muscles

• Reduced motor skills and reaction times

• 25% more time to react at age 40

• Balance contributes to higher rate of slips, trips and falls for older workers (NIH 2003)

  ✓ Maintain slip-resistant flooring
  
  ✓ Eliminate tripping hazards
  
  ✓ Ensure proper stairway design
  
  ✓ Use appropriate mats

Research shows 40% loss of the vestibular hair and nerve cells by 70 yrs!

Illustration taken from Wikipedia.
Aging - Psychosocial Changes

- Reduced tolerance to shift work
- Perform better in the morning
- Respond better to structured learning

Aging - We All Benefit

- Proactively develop sound ergonomics and safety practices
- Maintain worker productivity and engagement using training and re-training, including injury hazard recognition and communication
- Provide proper lighting in all work areas
- Maintain personal contact and aggressively pursue return to work cases
- Encourage engagement in wellness programs
- Leverage older workers as mentors
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<td>If you are looking for more ways to <strong>accommodate</strong>, <strong>enable</strong>, and <strong>sustain</strong> your aging workforce...</td>
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