



# Point of View

## Management Tips for Young Leaders: *Advice for managing workers who are older than you*

*Young leaders must take the lead in creating an environment that motivates and engages mature workers if they are to be successful managers.*

The American workforce is growing—not in size, but in age. By the end of 2006, half of the U.S. population will be more than 50 years old, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. And the 35-44 age group is actually experiencing negative growth in this decade, meaning that significantly fewer younger workers will be available to replace retiring workers. The aging workforce is changing the workplace, particularly as young leaders begin to manage employees who may be considerably older than themselves.

Managing employees of an earlier generation can be challenging and sometimes awkward for the younger manager. Yet, it is vital that young leaders learn how to motivate and manage this large and talented pool of workers. Here are a few ways to tweak your management style for older subordinates:

- **Don't stereotype.**  
As with any group of employees, it may be easy to make assumptions about older workers—that they are set in their ways or can't learn new processes or technologies, for example. Nonsense! Your employees are all individuals, regardless of age, so treat them that way.
- **Leverage their experience.**  
Your older workers have an invaluable asset that you likely don't—they have been there and done it. Use this experience to your advantage. And enable senior workers to mentor and coach younger team members so that they can benefit from their extensive knowledge and experience.
- **Personalize your management style.**  
Every employee is different. It is important to understand how an older worker may differ in their social interaction and work expectations from a younger worker. Once you understand those differences, it will be easier to adjust your management techniques for each individual.
- **Motivate based on what's important to them.**  
Older workers typically aren't focused on climbing the corporate ladder. Many have already done that. At this stage of their careers, they may be more interested in receiving recognition for good work or rewards, such as a monetary bonus or extra days off.

- **Communicate.**

Just as you would with workers of any age, it is important to set clear expectations and provide specific feedback to older employees. Hold regular meetings in which employees can express their concerns. For example, while job security is on almost everyone's mind it may be particularly worrisome for older workers.

- **Embrace the diversity of your team.**

Most good ideas don't spring from teams where everyone violently agrees. Different career experiences translate to unique perspectives that can breathe life into tired programs, products or services. Leverage the diversity of your employees' backgrounds to boost innovation in your organization. Your whole team will reap the rewards.

Young managers must take the lead in creating a climate in which mature workers will remain engaged and productive for many years to come. Following these suggestions can help you leverage this unique and valuable resource in ways that pay big dividends for everyone!