


Experience Pays

Employer Guide

to Recruiting, Retraining and Retaining Mature-Age Employees



Experience Pays Employer Guide to Recruiting, Retraining and Retaining Mature-Age Employees



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Introduction



Introduction -

In early 2007, the Experience Pays Awareness Strategy was launched at Clancy's Pies—a successful Gold Coast manufacturer.

Clancy's Pies, like other Queensland employers featured in this guide, is leading the way as an age-friendly employer.

As the case studies in this booklet show, small-to-medium sized businesses can adopt age-friendly work practices as effectively as larger organisations. No business is too small or too large to cultivate a workplace culture that embraces and values its older workers.

Not everyone knows how to attract, train or retain older workers. Research shows that employers are paying much higher recruitment costs to find the right people for their businesses, proving that retention is a key factor in today's employment environment.

The *Employer Guide to Recruiting, Retraining and Retaining Mature-Age Employees* provides you, the employer, with tips, advice, and examples for effective recruitment, retraining and retention practices, assisting you in developing an age-friendly workplace.

Recruit



Recruit -

Prepare your business for the future by adopting long-term recruitment strategies that attract applicants over 45 years of age.

Eighty-five per cent of new labour force growth is coming from this group, yet many older jobseekers still experience age bias when applying for jobs.

You can draw on a wider pool of talent by adopting age-friendly recruitment practices, particularly in the way positions are advertised and applicants are selected.

Below are some tips to help your business attract older workers.

The job ad should reflect the required skills and level of the position being advertised -

How do I write an age-friendly job ad?

An effective age-friendly job advertisement could:

- State that your business values and respects skills and experience
- State that your business is an age-friendly organisation and encourages all ages to apply
- Highlight the differences between your business and your competitors
- State salary range and/or other benefits (e.g. vehicle, mobile phone)
- State working hours, and if overtime is available/necessary
- Identify key features of the position
- Emphasise key positive aspects of the job including:
 - Location
 - Access to public transport
 - Job security
 - How long your business has been operating
 - Technology used in the workplace
 - Opportunity for future advancement
 - If flexible hours are an option, including part-time work
- State if training is available
- Avoid youth-oriented references (e.g. 'fast paced, high energy')

Example of an age-friendly advertisement -

We have great opportunities for people with a mature outlook to join our team at XYZ Enterprises in our Toowoomba and Maroochydore stores.

XYZ Enterprises can offer you a great opportunity to learn the business of retail food.

Our company is unique, exciting, challenging and one of the biggest growing franchises in the world.

We have a range of flexible work options, and welcome people of all ages who can make decisions and negotiate.

So if you have retail food experience or transferable life skills, please forward a covering letter and resume specifying which store you are applying for.

Postal Address

Where do I find mature-age employees?

If you advertise a position, place your job ad where older people are likely to see it, for example:

- Local newspapers and websites
- Local clubs
- Letterbox drops
- School and other newsletters
- Grey Nomad/older worker websites
- Caravan parks
- Shopping centres

Other methods to consider when recruiting include:

- Contacting former employees
- Word-of-mouth: ask employees to let friends and family know of the vacancy
- Offering current employees a 'spotter's fee'—a financial or other reward for finding the successful candidate

How do I know who will be best for the job?

Traditional job interviews can be a daunting experience for anyone. The formal interview is not always the most appropriate way to select staff. Sometimes a less rigid process may be more effective.

Below is a checklist to consider when interviewing applicants so they feel comfortable in the process while you assess if they are suitable for the position.

Checklist for selection process:

- Focus on skills and experience, not age
- Use people of different ages on the selection panel (if appropriate) to interview applicants
- Prepare suitable/appropriate questions for applicants which:
 - Relate to the job role
 - Are situational or hypothetical scenarios, including behavioural-based questions
 - Determine the applicant's life skills
- Consider providing the applicant with the questions before the interview
- Make the applicant as comfortable as possible
- Conduct reference checks and verify qualifications

Caution!

- Leave any personal biases at the door
- Be punctual
- Keep the processes short and simple
- Always show interest in the applicant and be attentive
- Allow applicants to speak freely
- Advise unsuccessful applicants promptly

Case study— Recruiting mature-age people

Experience pays for North Queensland employer

John Blood – ‘Life. Be in it’ NQ



‘Life. Be in it’ NQ proprietor John Blood (left) and Rockhampton Office Manager Gary Sait.

John Blood, proprietor of ‘Life. Be in it’ NQ, contacted the Experience Pays info line after seeing a press advertisement for the campaign.

‘Life. Be in it’ NQ is a government contractor for Work for the Dole programs with offices in Townsville, Rockhampton, Gladstone and Emerald.

John had already employed 58-year-old Gary Sait as Office Manager of the Rockhampton office and was very pleased with his performance.

“Gary has changed the way I think about older workers – he’s absolutely brilliant,” John said.

“There’s never a whinge, never a complaint and things are always done perfectly, and he puts in the extra time if needed.

“When I saw the Experience Pays ad I thought ‘let’s give this lot a go and see what we can come up with’.”

John contacted the Experience Pays 1800 number to find out how he could attract more older applicants.

“They didn’t overload me with information but gave enough to change the way I think,” he said.

“They gave me some tips on the wording of ads so they didn’t exclude that age bracket.”

John said thanks to Gary and the advice from the Experience Pays info line he has shifted his focus as an employer.

John has since employed two more older people as supervisors in the Rockhampton and Ingham offices.

“This has changed the way I look at mature-age job applicants,” he said.

Useful links:

Go to these web links for more advice on writing effective job ads to help you find potential employees:

- *Skilling Queenslanders for Work Initiative*: www.employment.qld.gov.au
- Jobwise: www.jobwise.gov.au
- Flexibility at Work: www.flexibility.com.au

For more tips and advice about recruiting older employees, go to the Experience Pays website: www.experiencepays.qld.gov.au

“It’s not that we seek to employ mature-age people, they just fall into the job—but we do find mature people to be reliable.”

Christine Plant, General Manager of Kaytown Shoes, Townsville.



Retrain -

Retraining employees ensures you have the right people with the skills to grow your business. Retraining and ongoing training also assists in the retention of staff of all ages.

Research shows that some employers are less likely to train mature-age staff than younger workers as there is a belief that older people have trouble learning new skills and adapting to change. However, recent studies have shown that older workers have good coping skills when faced with change.

Case study—Retraining mature-age employees

Keeping experience on the floor

Brad Coombs – QMW Industries

Brisbane manufacturer QMW Industries wants older workers back on the floor passing on their skills and experience to younger workers.

The company's Operations and Training Manager Brad Coombs said while older tradesmen generally leave manufacturing because of the physical demands of the trade, QMW attempts to retain them through job redesign, retraining and mentoring.



QMW Industries apprentice Ben Samuels (left) and team leader/mentor Victor Neverov.

“It is traditionally a fairly young workforce,” Brad said.

“We are trying to tap into older workers and bring them back – the days have gone where a younger workforce was preferred.

“There is a change in culture now – more experienced workers are the backbone of the workforce.”

Brad said working conditions in manufacturing industry have improved over the years so the workplace is more adaptable to older workers.

“Quality assurance, workplace health and safety and environmental requirements are - all part of it – so it is a lot safer and more supportive for workers,” Brad said. -

“We are aware of workers’ health issues and change the job tasks to suit their - capabilities. -

“For example, rather than taking physically demanding tasks like lifting or working - outside in the heat, we will redesign the job to focus on more bench work like welding.” -

Brad said the shift towards computer-based machinery has also brought a loss in traditional trade skills like hand oxy cutting, electric welding and forming and shaping, - so QMW uses mentoring to ensure these skills are not lost completely. -

“We currently have 14 apprentices being mentored,” Brad said. “We use it like a buddy - system, working next door, so the apprentice always has someone to relate to. -

“It is important they learn as much from their mentor’s knowledge and experience - before the mentor leaves the workforce. -

“And the encouragement mentors give to the younger fellas is important. -

“The mentor also feels valued because they are contributing. They are not just an employee, they are helping to pave the way for someone else.” -

While QMW values the original skills mature-age workers can pass on it also places - a priority on the retention of older workers through retraining and flexible work arrangements. -

“We have a workplace skills matrix so we can assess our areas of need,” Brad said. -

Sixty-year-old Victor Neverov has been working for QMW for 10 years. He is now a team - leader, mentoring a workshop of 12 tradespeople including apprentices. -

“We wanted to keep Victor out of retirement and retain his skills and knowledge so we - sent him on a leadership course,” Brad said. -

“We recognise what his needs are. For example, he now needs some basic computer - skills so he can take on work scheduling, so we will ease him into that. -

“It’s one thing to recruit but it is most important to keep them there. -

“Retention is our main focus – how we can keep the employee happy.” -

Depending on an employee’s needs, QMW offers all employees courses in advanced - welding, leadership, basic computing or workplace, health and safety. -

“It’s about understanding that not everyone is the same,” Brad said. -

Why should I retrain my mature-age workers?

Businesses who keep their employee's skills up-to-date through retraining will benefit from:

- A reduced need to recruit staff
- Assisted retention of staff and possible redeployment
- Succession planning to meet future workforce requirements
- Creating a workplace culture of valuing employees regardless of their age, and continuing to practice that culture
- Retraining injured employees for redeployment
- Training when new equipment is introduced

How do I work out who might need retraining?

An age-friendly employer will consider the types of training that will help keep the skills of older employees up-to-date and will be beneficial to that business. This can be achieved through a training needs analysis of employees to establish if there is a need to retrain and/or redeploy staff.

Here is an example of a concise individual training needs analysis:

Training needs analysis (individual)

Name: Employer: -

Contact No: Current Title:..... -

Current skills (what can he/she do?)	
Competencies REQUIRED (what does he/she need to be able to do in the future?)	
Learning needs (what does he/she need to learn to become competent?)	
Most appropriate training topics/outcomes	
Preferred method for learning	
Timeframe of employee and availability of trainer	

Knowledge training required in: -

Skills training required in: -

Attitude/behaviour training required in:..... -

Signed (Employee):..... Date:..... -

Signed (Employer Representative):..... Date:..... -

Signed (Trainer): Date:..... -

Useful links

Go to these web links to find out more about the training options available and cost benefits of retraining your older employees:

- Skilling Solutions Queensland: www.skillsolutions.qld.gov.au
- Department of Education and Training: www.training.qld.gov.au
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: www.deewr.gov.au
- Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre: www.qtac.edu.au
- Australian Apprenticeships Centre: www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au
- Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation: www.employment.qld.gov.au

For more tips and advice about retraining older employees, go to the Experience Pays website: www.experiencepays.qld.gov.au

“Bob had a crook leg so we brought him into the office working on the computer. At 66, he’s better on the computers than any of us—he’s a bit of a whiz and loads up all the new programs, then teaches us how to use them.”

Shane Walsh, Manager of Walsh’s Auto, Cairns.



Retain -

Retention is the most cost effective and vital strategy for your business.

Many Queensland businesses are already feeling the effects of the ageing workforce. Retaining older workers equates to retaining experience, corporate knowledge, productivity and diversity in your workplace. It also means you do not have the expense and inconvenience of recruiting someone new.

If you are unable to retain staff and experiencing a high staff turnover then you need to look at your workplace practices and how they are affecting your employees.

What are good workplace practices?

Adopting good workplace practices will create loyalty among employees, improve morale and increase the productivity of a business. Some good workplace practices include:

- Showing that you value your employees
- Offering flexible working arrangements
- Open communication—are your employees talking to you about problems?
- Facilitating life-long learning
- Implementing mentoring in the workplace
- Paying appropriate wages
- Rewarding effort
- Good job design/redesign
- Providing good leadership/demonstrating management
- Succession planning to meet future workforce requirements
- Retraining
- Redeploying

Case study— Retaining employees

Happy to stay in a cracker of a job

Geoff McDonald – Cracker Print and Paper



Cracker Print and Paper Manager Geoff McDonald (left), Sales Rep Audrey Hollingworth, Sales Rep Jim Barron and Admin Manager Lisa McDonald.

Eighty-four-year-old Jim Barron and seventy-one year-old Audrey Hollingworth are too busy getting on with the job to be thinking about retirement, thanks to their employer's age-friendly work practices.

Toowoomba based Cracker Print and Paper employs 24 staff – nine are mature-age, six of these are over 60, while four are under 22 years of age.

Manager Geoff McDonald said mature-age employees bring stability to the workplace and reassure younger employees they will still have a job when they get older.

“Younger people appreciate having older people around—they bring a settling influence,” said Geoff. “You can’t put a value on that.”

Geoff believes in holding onto existing employees rather than continuously struggling to find suitable job applicants.

“We are keen to look after our staff,” said Geoff. “You’re better off looking after the ones you’ve got.”

Cracker offers flexible work options to all employees to fit in with their various life and health issues.

Audrey and Jim are both sales representatives for Cracker, and Geoff values the experience and knowledge they bring to his business.

Three years ago, Geoff asked Audrey to come out of retirement and return to her old Mount Isa run in return for improved conditions, a better car and flexible hours.

“We talk with Audrey each day when she’s on the road and make sure she’s okay and the car is okay,” said Geoff.

“Sometimes she can be away for two weeks at a time, so we plan the trips to suit her needs.

“It’s amazing the rapport she has with people because they know her – experience comes with age.”

Over the years, Audrey and Jim have developed relationships with their clients that are irreplaceable.

Jim has been working in the printing business for 25 years, after 36 years in automotive and transport, and still takes pride in his job.

‘Customer satisfaction’ is my catch-cry,” said Jim.

“It’s quite amazing,” said Geoff. “Over time Jim has become a mentor for all of us and inspiration for his clients, and he is a sounding board for other employees who often ask for his advice on issues.”

“You’ve got to keep the brain working. It has to be exercised, just like the body,” said Jim.

Jim and Audrey have become invaluable employees at Cracker Print and Paper as not only do they have a wealth of knowledge and experience, they are respected and motivate colleagues and clients.

“When people ask me ‘when are you going to quit?’ I say ‘how do you know when to knock off?’” said Jim.

How do I know if my employees feel valued?

To determine if your staff feel valued and are therefore likely to remain with your business, consider these points:

- What is the staff turnover?
- What is the level of absenteeism?
- Do employees look and act happy?
- Are they punctual?
- Do they participate in social activities with work colleagues?
- What is the level of union involvement/mediation?

How can I show I value my employees?

Some approaches to invite feedback from your staff and let them know they are valued include:

- Conducting an anonymous survey of staff opinions (not appropriate for small businesses)
- Regularly giving positive feedback to employees
- Encouraging and listening to feedback from employees
- Conducting regular staff meetings
- Establishing a culture of respect and value in the workplace and ensuring it is put into practice in everyday workplace decisions

What does a flexible workplace look like?

An age-friendly employer will understand work/life balance needs and offer flexible working arrangements, thereby benefiting from retaining skilled and experienced workers.

To retain older employees, offer flexible options such as:

- Recognising carer responsibilities (e.g. aged care or grandchildren) and accommodating these
- Working from home
- Time off in lieu
- Flexible shift arrangements
- Flexible hours, including job sharing, part-time work, compressed week
- Leave without pay
- Proportionate leave and salary arrangements (e.g. purchasing extra leave)
- Phased retirement (e.g. mentoring of new/younger workers)
- Fifth day off using long service leave
- Regularly review flexible work arrangements
- Salary sacrifice options

Why should I consider mentoring?

Mentoring is an effective strategy that can contribute significantly to the career development of your employees. Mentoring allows people to share their professional and personal skills and experiences. It is typically a one-to-one relationship between a more experienced and less experienced employee.

It is based on constructive comments, openness, mutual trust, respect and a willingness to learn and share.

Mentoring is relatively easy to administer and benefits all concerned, including you the employer, the mentorees, the mentor and all other employees. It is an effective way to transfer and increase the professional, technical and management skills and knowledge within your business.

“We currently have 14 apprentices being mentored. We use it like a buddy system, working next door, so the apprentice always has someone to relate to. It is important they learn as much from their mentor’s knowledge and experience before the mentor leaves the workforce. They are helping to pave the way for someone else.”

Brad Coombs, Operations and Training Manager of QMW Industries, Brisbane.

What can job design/redesign do?

The proportion of older workers in the workforce is increasing and will continue to increase. It is important to maximise the contribution of your existing mature-age workers and encourage greater retention by implementing an integrated human resource strategy that aims to keep employees in good health and free of injury.

Whenever a job is changed, you have an opportunity to increase both the quality of your employees’ work life, and their on-the-job productivity. If you address the risks faced by your older workers, you actually benefit all employees as the causes of work-related injuries are similar for employees across all age groups.

Strategies that reduce workplace hazards and improve work and job design will benefit employees of all ages. Factors to take into consideration when developing or redesigning a job for an older worker include:

- Ensuring the employee has some control over their work, particularly key aspects or tasks
- Reducing physical loads. Older workers will be able to perform more effectively and with a lower risk of injury if physical loads are reduced to match reduced physical strength. This is particularly important if repetitive movements are combined with postures that take effort to maintain, or that require fast or forceful movements
- Avoiding an older employee's exposure to extremely hot or cold conditions
- Ensuring good visibility of task-related information. Eyesight decreases with age, so the working environment may need to be modified to meet the changing visual capacities of older workers
- Reducing postural demands for workers of all ages. Postures that take effort to maintain are one of the most commonly experienced risk factors for musculoskeletal injuries. For older workers the problems associated with such postures can be worsened by age-related reduction in joint mobility. Consideration should be given to limiting long periods of seated work, standing in the one position, squatting or kneeling

Job redesign should occur in consultation with your employee, particularly if it is established that the employee can no longer effectively and/or safely perform their existing duties. You should allow individuals time to adapt to changed work requirements and monitor those changes with the worker.

Useful links

Go to these web links to find out more about developing good workplace practices and retaining valuable older employees:

- Business Work and Ageing:
www.swinburne.edu.au/business/businessworkageing/
- Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation:
www.employment.qld.gov.au
- - Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations:
www.deewr.gov.au

For more tips and advice on retaining older employees, go to the Experience Pays website: www.experiencepays.qld.gov.au

“It’s like their own business — they worry about it more than I do.”

Patrick Clancy, Managing Director of Clancy’s Pies, Currumbin Waters

Case study — Retaining employees

Council serious about keeping older employees

Cairns City Council, North Queensland

Cairns City Council must be doing something right when it comes to age-friendly employment practices — employees just don’t want to leave!

Human Resource Consultant Christine Posgate said Cairns City Council employs 1,200 people, of which 40.77 per cent are over the age of 45 years.

“Most council employees work to retirement age and beyond,” said Christine.

“We offer good working conditions and flexible work options.”



Cairns City Council Events and Civic Relations Coordinator Glenda McAuliffe.

Glenda McAuliffe, 59, has been with Cairns City Council for 19 years and chooses to continue working as an Events and Civic Relations Coordinator instead of retiring.

“If you enjoy your job, you have good health and you know you are still making a valuable contribution, why would you want to retire to go home and grow marigolds for the next 10 years?” said Glenda.

“And it’s lovely being financially independent, having five weeks paid holiday a year as a reward, and a purpose to get up in the morning and get your ‘glad-rags’ and ‘war paint’ on ready for the day — you can’t beat that!

“The young ones keep us feeling young and teach us new skills, while we mature workers provide them with the knowledge learnt over our many years of living and experience in the workforce.”

Glenda organises council events like Carols by Candlelight and meets many dignitaries and members of the community as part of her job.

“It’s a fabulous and rewarding job,” said Glenda. -

“Cairns City Council has been an excellent employer – as the saying goes ‘you reap what you sow!’” -

Christine said employees like Glenda are highly valued by the Council for the experience and enthusiasm they bring to the job. -

“We’d be lost without her. She has a wealth of knowledge,” said Christine. -

While Glenda is not thinking of bowing out yet, some employees are preparing to retire so Cairns City Council has adopted strategies to retain older employees while assisting their transition into retirement. -

“We offer flexible work options like part-time work, utilising long service leave or working from home – we are open minded to all options,” said Christine. -

“For example Laird Shepherd is a Project Officer in Strategic Planning and has been with Council for over 43 years. -

“Laird is 65 and has a great deal of corporate knowledge and experience which we don’t want to lose.”

For the last five years, Laird has been working a four-day week, and taking the other day as long service leave. -

“I appreciate Council’s flexibility with my hours which I could reduce further if I wished,” said Laird. -

“I get a great deal of satisfaction from contributing to the job. -

“Working past 65 is stimulating – it keeps me engaged with the world around me.” -

In addition to his core duties, Laird’s position has taken on an advisory and mentoring role so his experience and knowledge can be documented and passed on. -

“You couldn’t replace Laird – think about the adaptations he has had to make over 40 years,” said Christine.

“And he has an incredible capacity to take on technology – he is quite comfortable with email and computer systems.” -

While Council works to retain its older employees, older jobseekers can be reassured when applying for a position with Cairns City Council that selections are made in a recruitment process that includes an age-is-no-barrier policy. -

“We look at an applicant’s skills and how they can be adapted to the job,” said Christine. -

“All interviews are headed by an accredited chair who ensures there is no discrimination in the process and people are selected based on their merit.” -

Llew Beaton, now 63, was employed by Cairns City Council in 2003 at age 59 as a Technical Officer with City Development and Town Planning.

Llew was unemployed for several years beforehand and had experienced a great deal of age-discrimination when applying for work.

“At that time I found anyone who was over 45 or 50 was rejected in the workforce – a lot of older people could not get a job,” said Llew. -



Cairns City Council Technical Officer, Llew Beaton with his Alfa Romeo Spider sports car.

Llew moved to Cairns in 2001 with many years of town planning experience in South Africa and Western Australia under his belt. However, a 15-year break from the field left a gap in his skills base.

“I didn’t have any computer skills and couldn’t get a job for a number of years – it was almost humiliating.”

He completed a course in basic computer skills with Centacare Cairns that boosted his confidence and helped him secure the position with the Council.

Llew has since proven his worth in a demanding position that includes assessing development applications, considering environmental issues, research work, report writing and working to tight timeframes.

In 2006, the Council offered an incentive that would inspire Llew to remain working for the next three to five years – an Alfa Romeo Spider sports car.

Llew salary sacrifices into a private lease arrangement with the Council and SMB Fleet Management so that he can drive his dream car.

“This is a life-long ambition fulfilled and a great incentive to work beyond 65,” said Llew.

“As long as my health holds out, why not?”

Cairns City Council can see the value in retaining the knowledge and skills of employees like Llew and offer working options to suit individual needs.

“People should be able to work in the role they want for as long as they want to,” said Christine.

Further information -

For further general information on the *Employer Guide to Recruiting, Retraining and Retaining Mature-Age Employees*, please contact the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation.

Telephone: 1800 630 647

Website: www.experiencepays.qld.gov.au

Telephone interpreter service: 13 14 50



Acknowledgments

Australian Industry Group (Ai Group) -

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU)

Australian Workers' Union (AWU)

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