

Employers go for wise, versatile, gold

By Doug McPherson, Denver Post

Employers are finding the contrasts between young workers and silver employees are stark. In many cases, employers prefer age over newbies.

For example, employer Diane Carter was astonished recently when a new hire in her 20s requested that Carter not ask her any questions before noon. Why? The newcomer wasn't a 'morning person' and found that inquiries before noon were just too stressful. "It stunned me," said Carter, president and CEO of the American Association of Nurse Assessment Coordinators. "I had to laugh . . . I said, 'Well, maybe I should just pay you from noon until 5.'" To Carter, who has seven baby boomers on her nine-person staff of mostly program managers, the contrasts between younger and older workers are downright eye-popping. In perhaps another surprise, she has plenty of praise for baby boomers.

Boomers 'get it'

"They understand organizational behavior, that work is about the customer and not about themselves.

They're reliable, flexible. They have solid values that translate well to the workplace. They pitch in and they understand teamwork," she said. "All that's missing in younger workers. They have a sense of entitlement that older workers don't have and really don't even understand."

Evidently, other employers approve of baby boomers' on-the-job traits. Reportedly, Americans 55 and older landed nearly 3 million jobs in the past three years; more than 2 million positions were full-time. And that's good news locally, because Denver is the baby boomer capital of America with the highest percentage of boomer-age residents of any US. city.

But, is the age of age discrimination in the workplace over? Some say the balance of power now favors older workers. "Ironically, now the minority are persons age 40," said Chuck Passaglia, a local employment attorney. "The most common complaint I get . . . is that only those 40 and older are protected." Data show complaints of age discrimination are declining. Last year, the federal Economic Employment Opportunity

Commission received 16,585 complaints, down from a record 19,921 in 2002. Nevertheless, Passaglia said that requests for age related information from a prospective employer, such as for a candidate's school graduation date, "should be closely scrutinized."

Despite praise for older folks, employment specialists say finding a job is not a slam dunk for these experienced players.

Old and young, alike, sometimes need help finding employment, said Stephanie Klein, president of the Boomer Group Inc., a Denver-based placement agency for baby boomers. "I've seen some boomers who have the attitude that because they're older, the world owes them a job. That attitude won't do well in the job market" Klein said. Still, she is seeing more appreciation than ever for baby boomers. Industries with a special interest in silver workers include insurance, banking, oil and gas, telecom and construction sectors.

The University of Colorado Hospital Authority and Pinnacol Assurance

both in Denver, were honored in 2005 by American Association of Retired Persons as best employers for workers over age 50. Pinnacol, which has 131 workers (24 percent) aged 50-plus workers, appreciates their experience, and work ethic, said Margie McCarthy, director of public relations. In return, the company offers them flexible time off, its traditional pension plan, job training and on site wellness center." All of these items are important to our older workers," she said.

"They know what amazing customer service is," said UC Hospital's Mary Furman of its senior staffers. The hospital offers flexible work schedules and wellness benefits to older employees who work a minimum of 20 hours a week. "An individual could have retired from one company and still qualify for our retirement programs," she said.