Workplace Safety & Disability Management:

Addressing the Multigenerational Workforce

Susan Salsbury OTR/L CDMS
OhioHealth – Associate Health & Wellness
Objectives

• Increase awareness of issues with a multigenerational workforce

• Increase understanding of the differences and commonalities among generations

• Increase awareness of safety implications working with a multigenerational workforce
The Aging Workforce

• Median age of U.S. worker in 2006 was 40

• By 2014, nearly one third of total U.S. workforce will be 50 or older

• One in five people in the US will be 65 or older in 2030 per U.S. Census Bureau

• Life expectancy is increasing
Employment Trends

- More educated persons are more likely to stay in the workforce longer (typically healthier, tend to have higher earnings and are less likely to perform physically demanding jobs)
- Divorce often keeps older women in the workforce longer
- Although the majority of older workers work part time, the percentage of older workers working full-time is increasing, 48% for men 65 and older and 37% for women 65 and older

www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu
Why are older adults staying employed?

- Economic recession
- Losses suffered in retirement and investment portfolios
- Declines in home equity values
- Desire to stay active and connected in the workforce
- Longer life expectancy
What defines a generation?

• A group of people that shares a common set of formative events and trends
  – Headlines, heroes, music, mood, parenting styles and education

• During their formative years they are coded with data about what is right and wrong, good and bad, stylish and unstylish

• Each has its own perspective about leadership, communication, problem solving and decision making
“People resemble their times more than they resemble their parents.”

~Arab proverb
Generational Perceptions in the Workplace

• Workplace demographics span four generations

• Generalities can be helpful in becoming aware of trends with generation groups but…

• “Put the individual first, and the generational issues second.” Carol Harnett MS GBDS
Benefits of a Multigenerational Work Team

• Attracting and retaining talented people of all ages
• Team is more flexible
• Team can gain greater market share because members reflect multigenerational market
• Decisions are stronger because they reflect multiple perspectives
• Team is more innovative and creative
• Team can meet the needs of a diverse public
What generation are you part of?

A quick test!
Traditionalists

• Silent Generation
• World War II Generation
• Greatest Generation
• Industrialists
• GI Joe Generation
• Builders
• Matures
• Depression Babies
Traditionalists

- Born 1927 to 1945
- Currently eight percent of workforce
- Strong commitment to families, soldiers, country and community
- Strong work ethic
- Grateful to have work
• Make do or do without.
• Stay in line.
• Sacrifice.
• Be heroic.
• Consider the common good.

Popular Technology
Learning Preferences

• Face to face communication with written documentation
• Respond well to traditional classroom lectures with topic experts
• Need feel that time spent is of value
• Want clarity about expectations at the start
• Appreciate rules, standards and deadlines
• Dislike situations where they may be made to look foolish
The Baby Boom Generation

- Boomers
- Vietnam Generation
- Me Generation
The Baby Boom Generation

• Born 1946 to 1964
• Largest cohort in the workplace 44% of U.S. workforce
• Strong work ethic “live to work”
• Good team members
• Most likely to work overtime
• More than 50% will have to work beyond age 65
• Be anything you want to be.
• Change the world.
• Work well with others.
• Live up to expectations.

Popular Technology
Learning Preferences

• Expect open, direct communication style, but do not appreciate controlling language
• Like teaming-building sessions
• Like self learning (videos, audio tapes)
• Value lifelong learning
• Want to know what options they have, how much flexibility there is
Generation X

- Gen X
- Baby Busters
- Twenty-somethings
- Post- Boomers
Generation X

- Born 1965 to 1980
- Accounts for 33 percent of U.S. Labor Force
- Desire to “work and live”
- Less loyal than other generations
- More women in the workforce
- Learned to thrive in the midst of chaos and change
• Don’t count on it.
• Heroes don’t exist.
• Get real.
• Take care of yourself.
• Always ask “why”?
Learning Preferences

• Prefer informal communication style, expects feedback- both ways
• Like CD- ROM, interactive videos, distance learning and internet courses
• Prefers e-mail
• Want to manage assignments and deadlines
• Likes role-playing and coaching
Millennial Generation

- Generation Y
- Internet Generation
- Echo Boomers
- Nexters
- Digital Generation
Generation Y (Millennials)

• Born 1981 to 1994
• Fastest growing cohort, 15 percent of the U.S. workforce
• Grew up with technology
• Most flexible in regards to work
• Goal and achievement oriented
• Have high expectations
• High levels of social and environmental concern
• You are special.
• Leave no one behind.
• Connect 24/7.
• Achieve now!
• Serve your community.
Learning Preferences

• Prefer learning environment that is challenging with an element of “fun”-interactive

• Want autonomy, input into learning process and prefer a variety of methods to hold their attention

• Dislikes lectures

• Appreciates positive reinforcement

• Text messages
### Challenges for Managers

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Multiple Generations on the Job/Working Together

• *It’s not just about age – It’s about*
  - Attitudes about work
  - Attitudes about benefits
  - Reward preferences

• *Different Learning Styles*
  - Auditory
  - Visual
  - Kinesthetic
  - Interactive

• *Communication Preferences*
Safety Concerns in a Multigenerational Workforce

• Preventing injuries in younger less experienced employees

• Hazards do not change but the perception, awareness and experience of younger generation is very different than for someone who has experienced them first hand
Safety Concerns in a Multigenerational Workforce

- Provided varied education formats for training
- Meet the learning needs of the individual
- Mentoring and peer modeling can improve safety behaviors across generations
- Emphasis on safety culture, not a safety program
Physical Changes with Older Workers

• Reaction time
• Balance
• Respiratory System
• Musculoskeletal system
• Vision
• Hearing
Reaction Time

• Encourage regular vision exams
• Provide adequate lighting
• Place signage in places easily see
• Minimize sources of background noise
• Avoid environments that create chaos
• Ensure that equipment warning devises are loud and recognizable
Balance

- Keep walking surfaces clear
- Provide handrails on inclines and stairs
- Wear slip resistant low heeled shoes
- Place signage in places easily see
- Maintain a regular exercise program
Respiratory System

- Cardiovascular respiratory function declines 15-25% from age 20-65
- Avoid strenuous work in hot/humid environments
- Stay hydrated
- Encourage self paced work
- Ensure adequate breaks
Musculoskeletal System

- Force/repetition/posture
- Use mechanization when possible
- Organize workstations to minimize lifting
- Avoid repetitive tasks
- Anti fatigue mats for prolonged standing
- Ergonomic consultation for proper job design
Vision

• Improve contrast between objects by using lighting
• Reduce glare with shades, diffusers and indirect lighting
• Avoid shades of blue, blue on green or blue on black
• Place signs in places that are easily seen
Hearing

- Minimize machine, air conditioning and other sources of background noise
- Use sound absorbing construction material
- Avoid room designs that create echoes
Multigenerational Applications
Health, Wellness and Prevention

• Employers need to take a proactive approach to health and wellness

• Harvard study showed for every dollar spent on wellness programs medical costs fell by $3.27 and absenteeism costs fell by $2.73

• Improvement in absenteeism resulted in annual savings of 1.7 days or $274 per employee per year

http://content.healthaffairs.org/cgi/content/abstract/29/2/304
Multigenerational Applications
Health, Wellness and Prevention

• Motivate healthy behaviors across generations

• Provide varied programs on nutrition, exercise, smoking cessation, stress management

• Offer health events that appeal to many generations
References

- [www.CDMS.org](http://www.CDMS.org) White Paper Disability Management: Addressing the Multigenerational Workforce

- [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) Leading a Multigenerational Workforce

- [www.ohiobwc.com](http://www.ohiobwc.com) Safety Leader’s Discussion Guide