

Young bosses, older workers: Do's and don'ts



There's nothing like a young manager—bright-eyed, full of pep and ideas, ready to make his or her mark in the organization.

But often, the young manager makes mistakes that could lead the organization to age discrimination lawsuits. These mistakes usually have roots in the young manager's stereotypes about older workers. Here is a list of do's and don'ts to help keep your older workers happy, and your organization out of trouble:

DON'T confuse authority with arrogance. There's no need to constantly remind older employees who is in charge, which could verge on becoming workplace bullying.

DO take the time to get to know employees as individuals. Younger managers might be surprised to discover they share common values, aspirations and needs with older employees.

DON'T limit older employees' opportunities to expand current skills or learn new ones because of an assumption that they don't have the need, ability or desire to learn something new.

DON'T set up work teams by age, based on the assumption that people are most comfortable working with colleagues the same age. This could be seen as segregation.

DO realize that older workers have much to offer. Workers who have been around the block a few times have years of on-the-job experience—plus if they've been with the company for a while, they also have the inside track into company personalities and politics. Their opinions and advice can be valuable.

DON'T lower production standards or take work away because of an assumption that older employees can't keep up.

DON'T offer flexible work options to younger employees, but not to older workers. Just because older employees may not have child care obligations, that doesn't mean they wouldn't appreciate the opportunity to work a flex schedule.

DO judge older workers on their actual abilities and tangible behaviors. Age is not indicative of technological prowess, productivity, flexibility, loyalty, etc.

DON'T take older workers for granted. They should be showered with as much praise and recognition for a job well done as younger employees.

DON'T use age-related nicknames (Pops, Grammy) to refer to older employees, even if the name is meant as a term of endearment.

Did you know?

Most age discrimination cases grow out of wrongful discharge and mandatory retirement policies, but they can involve any adverse change in working conditions, including denial of a promotion or training.