

## Myths and Realities About Older Workers

Some of the social, economic, safety and medical myths about older workers are based on a perception that older workers are frail, unreliable and incapable of working effectively and safely. It is time to set aside these stereotypes and negative attitudes. The following chart presents and responds to some of these myths.

Myths and Realities About Older Workers	
Myth	Reality
Older workers are more likely to have work-related injuries.	Not True. In fact, older workers suffer fewer job-related injuries.
Older people are all alike.	Differences within age groups are often greater than those between age groups.
Older adults are unable or unwilling to learn new things or skills.	Age does not determine curiosity or the willingness to learn. Older workers may sometimes take slightly longer to learn certain tasks and may respond better to training methods more suited to their needs.
Older adults avoid new approaches or new technologies.	Many people, regardless of age, enjoy new technology. Older workers are likely to respond well to innovation if it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relates to what they already know</li> <li>• allows for self-paced learning</li> <li>• provides opportunities for practise and support.</li> </ul>
Older workers have failing memories.	Long-term memory continues to increase with age.
It is not worthwhile investing in training older workers because they are likely to leave or are “just coasting to retirement.”	Older workers tend to be loyal and less likely to change jobs frequently. This is particularly the case if older workers know their efforts are appreciated and they are not faced with a mandatory retirement age.  Mature workers are part of a growing and diverse group, ranging in age from their 50s to their 70s. The Government of Alberta forecasts that 78% of workers aged 55-64 and 20% of those over 65 will be participating in the labour market by 2019. <sup>1</sup>  In a knowledge economy, the payback period on investment in training is becoming shorter for all workers. That means that spending on training older workers is very likely to be recovered before these workers retire.

<sup>1</sup> Government of Alberta (2010). [Engaging the Mature Worker: An Action Plan for Alberta](#). Retrieved on July 21, 2011.

## Myths and Realities About Older Workers (continued)

Myth	Reality
Older workers are less productive.	<p>Productivity is individual and varies more within an age group than between age groups. No significant impact on productivity due to aging is likely until workers are well into their 70s. Older workers may be less productive doing heavy physical work. However, most jobs do not require maximum physical exertion. Older workers generally make up for any decline in physical or mental ability through experience and forethought. If strength and agility are a factor, older workers can usually find ways to compensate by “working smarter.”</p> <p>Older workers are often well trained and have a track record of responsibility and dedication.</p>
Older workers relate poorly to customers.	Older workers can often be more effective than younger workers when experience or people skills are needed, as when dealing with customers or building a client base.
Older workers are inflexible.	Older workers may be more cautious, a trait that can improve accuracy and safety.
Older adults have impaired mental or intellectual capacity.	<p>Studies show intellectual abilities stay intact into the 70s and beyond. Short-term memory may start declining well before age 45, but measurable, in-depth knowledge continues to increase as we age.</p> <p>Age tends to enhance the ability to perform activities depending on judgment, decision-making and general knowledge.</p>
Most older adults have poor health.	Three-quarters of Canadians aged 65 to 74 and two-thirds of those over 75 rate their health as good or very good. These figures are even higher for workers aged 45 to 64.
Older workers are more likely to suffer from illness and are more often absent or late for work than younger workers.	<p>Most studies show older workers have lower absenteeism and tend to be more punctual than younger workers.</p> <p>Usually, older workers with health conditions requiring extensive sick leave have left the workforce on their own accord. Any significant increase in hospital stays or sick leave are not likely to show up until people are over 80.</p>
Older workers have less education.	While this may have been true at one time, it is less a factor now when many well-educated baby boomers fill the ranks of older workers