

Case study: Allevard Springs

Workforce management

Allevard Springs specialises in the design and manufacture of coil suspension precision springs for the automotive industry. At its factory in the Rhondda Valley, Glamorgan, staff turnover is very low, with 83 per cent of employees having worked in the plant for over five years.

Recruiting the right staff

The company has a positive view about employing older workers; there is no reference to age on application forms and recruitment decisions are based on a person's ability to carry out the job or task allocated to them and not on the basis of age.

Despite a high level of unemployment in the area, Perry Stephens, management services manager, says that:

“There is a shortage of skilled maintenance people, which older people play an important part in filling. For example, the company currently has five 'super skilled' engineering technicians and two of them are over 60 and one is over 50 years of age.”

The company's view is that employers can benefit enormously from having older people in their workforce, bringing with them skills learnt during their working life coupled with a willingness to continue to learn. Continues Perry: “If somebody is capable of doing whatever job function is required, then age doesn't come into it.”

Keeping good staff

The atmosphere at the company's modern plant in Tonypany is friendly and Perry believes that the wide age spectrum is partly the reason for this. Absenteeism is low at less than two per cent, including long-term sickness.

Perry says that although he is aware of the misconception that older people may take more time off work because of illness, this hasn't been his experience:

“I find that it's the exact opposite. There's quite a number of older people who haven't missed any time whatsoever, such as Paul, who's had one day off in over 20 years.”

Perry also finds that older employees are just as happy as their other employees to work the usual shift patterns; “We've got quite a few people in their late 50s still doing the regular shifts: 6.00-2.00; 2.00-10.00; 10.00-6.00.”

Each individual's training and development needs are informed by annual staff appraisals. Again, age is irrelevant in this process as is seniority. All staff, whether on the shop floor or in senior management, receive their appraisal.

Flexible retirement

The company's retirement age is 65 but it is happy for employees to work beyond that. Jane Hughes is one employee who is interested in this possibility, after joining the organisation at the age of 60.

Jane was recruited on a temporary basis to help the purchase ledger clerk when the factory's accounts department found itself shorthanded. She had lots of previous experience and was able to use all of the necessary software programmes. When the accountant became aware of how skilled she was, she was asked to help with some other work.

Jane soon became a permanent employee and enjoys her role: “Work keeps you active and keeps your mind alive, especially when you're learning new things. It also gives you a routine and you make friends too. It makes no difference whether you're young or older - working is a benefit to everybody.”

Other staff have retired and decided to return to the organisation; one for a further 15 months and another who is still enjoying work and plans to continue.

The business benefits for Allevard Springs of an age diverse workforce:

- Low staff turnover - 83% of employees have worked in the plant for over five years
- Recruiting from wider talent pool and retaining experience helps to fill skills shortages
- Wide age spectrum makes for a relaxed, friendly culture.