

Managing Someone Older Than You



Older workers (age 55+) are a rapidly growing segment of the workforce, and research shows that their job performance is often superior in every aspect. They bring to the table the experience and skills employers are looking for. But the older workforce can pose a unique challenge for younger supervisors, who may have difficulty managing someone who has more experience than they do. Are you or one of your peers dealing with the challenge of managing an older, more experienced staff member? Here are a few steps that may help.

1. **Recognize the problem.** It works both ways. Older workers may feel just as challenged reporting to someone younger and with less experience than they. So a dictatorial “just do it” or “because I know what works” approach is not going to help either of you.
2. **Engage older subordinates in defining and solving problems.** Ask them to review the pro’s and con’s of potential decisions, or to anticipate likely scenarios when you’re dealing with uncertain situations. It’s true that they may have “been there, done that” and so they may respond with unique ideas and perspectives that can help reduce potential risks.

The Expert Manager

vharrisprojects

Managing Someone Older Than You



- 3. **Overcome your biases.** Would you be surprised to know that younger supervisors tend to give lower appraisals to older workers regardless of the quality of their work? Younger supervisors are also less likely to recognize when training would improve the performance of older subordinates compared to younger ones. Being aware of these often unconscious biases can help younger supervisors be more fair in their management practices.
- 4. **Older subordinates still need to be managed.** If you supervise an older worker, don't shy away from doing your job. Set goals collaboratively and plan for regular evaluations, as you would with any other staff member. Acknowledge that everyone appreciates praise, but everyone must be held accountable when performance is substandard.

Have you had experience managing older staff members? Did you find yourself behaving differently with them than with other staff? Do you think you would have a problem managing a senior staff member?