

The Rocky Mountain Conference on Aging Aging in the Workplace

“Embracing an Aging Workforce”

Presenter: Shelie Gustafson, VP Human Resources CH2MHILL

Date and Time: 10/24/07, 3:30-4:30 pm

Shelie Gustafson discussed many aspects of the aging workforce and how companies and employers can embrace their older workers. Some key points in Gustafson's presentation include how an aging workforce impacts an organization, how to embrace older adults in the work force rather than replacing them, strategies on how to recruit and maintain the employment of older workers, and the real life application of how to start and engage in conversations at one's company about embracing an aging workforce. Both the advantages and disadvantages of each area were outlined and opened up to discussion among the audience of Gustafson's presentation.

She discussed the negative impact of losing experienced talent and the impact this loss has on a company's development and overall performance. A proposed solution to this problem is phased retirement. Phased retirement is the shift from working a full time schedule to part time hours. This eases the worker and the company into the individual's retirement which has intellectual and monetary rewards. This would potentially do away with the breach which exists between formal retirement and rehiring. Post-retirement re-employment enables managers to re-hire retirees on an as-needed basis and as Gustafson stated, "...allows managers to target critical skilled employees" (Gustafson, 2007).

The presentation also capitalized on the importance of mentoring. With an older worker paired with a younger worker knowledge or skills are passed on. Gustafson gave the example of NASA's Transfer Wisdom Workshops where mentoring is achieved through one day workshops. Discussions are carried out in small groups with examples of case studies and personal experience. This may institute a story-telling culture. The goal of mentoring programs is to promote a nice transition and transfer of knowledge.

The third solution suggested companies implement a volunteer program. This way retirees are still involved and they can help train and teach new employees. Another solution could be to encourage an older worker to publish their best ideas or practices so knowledge may be transferred. To recognize and value the older worker's experience is a powerful tool to make older adults feel appreciated and foster mentoring and volunteering. Shelie's presentation was highly informative as well as interactive. Her ideas and solutions of how to embrace an aging workforce are key to any company's present and future success.

Submitted by: Rachel Rota, Colorado State University, October 24, 2007