

# WORK THOUGHTS

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## A Business Question

**How old are you?**

**Not a favorite question?** For some people, the age question feels as inappropriate as the weight question or the salary question. After all, Americans value youth over age and have to create laws to protect their aging workforce!

**Fortunately**, employee assistance programs (EAPs) are ideally positioned to witness the value of older workers' involvement on the job. EAP data conclude that older workers demonstrate numerous **strengths**, including...

- More skills and experience
- Corporate memory
- Increased quality of work
- Leadership skills and wisdom
- Less absenteeism
- Potential for higher levels of well-being

**In fact, it is a myth that well-being diminishes with age.** Older individuals report higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of stress and depression overall, primarily because of fewer disruptive life events and fewer outside responsibilities (children grown up, mortgages paid off, etc.).

**And if you think** younger workers out-perform older co-workers, you would be mistaken. Hundreds of studies find no consistent relationship between age and work performance. The challenge is that today everything is moving faster due to globalization, information technology, increased customer focus, and greater competition all around. Unfortunately, many older workers perform best without time pressures and when quality of work is judged over quantity.

**Another challenge for older workers is that they** tend to face more workplace relationship and conflict problems and are less likely to access EAP services due to the mistaken idea that problems should be ignored and/or managed privately.

**Because older workers are not help-seekers by nature**, employers are wise to make EAP usage easy and convenient. In turn, EAPs can help businesses manage older workers' occasional passive strategies for coping with stress (such as dealing with problems internally, distancing themselves, and avoiding issues altogether).

**As you might guess**, dealing effectively with older workers will become increasingly important, especially given that the youngest boomers may not retire until the year 2044 at the ripe old age of 80! **Wow!** That could mean years and years of good (or bad) performance! Which will it be at your workplace?

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