

CHICAGO—Let them do work! That's the Labor Day anthem for mature workers according to a newly-released study by Age Lessons, a Chicago-based intergenerational consulting firm, that identified the workplace "3 Rs" that keep Baby Boomer employees up at night—fear of redundancy [layoffs, firings], relevance [keeping skills current] and resentment from younger associates.

The Age Lessons study, comprising 50 depth phone interviews with workers age 50+, explored issues surfaced in the firm's national Ageism: Managing on the Bias research completed with Harris Interactive.

Laurel Kennedy, president of Age Lessons, summarized key findings, "Older workers believe that younger associates drop them from critical informal communications networks, turning the office grapevine into a sour grapevine and blocking access to important political and business developments." Another key finding was defined as senior shutout, where companies inadvertently close-off career paths and training opportunities to mature workers, assuming that they either are uninterested or unwilling to accept a new challenge."

"Whether it's overt, or unintentional, the net effect is the same," noted Kennedy. "Mature workers gradually get foreclosed from water cooler banter on-line and off, and shunted to the sidelines. Without access to emerging news in the workplace, mature workers find it difficult to make good strategic decisions and career moves."

Other communication issues identified in the research involved body language during team meetings when an older worker held the floor, such as yawning, lack of eye contact and doodling, and, a more recent distraction, sending text messages or checking instant messages on iPhones and PDAs under the table.

Kennedy suggested some simple fixes companies can implement which include:

- awareness training during on-boarding about generational differences, office and meeting etiquette,
- adopting age-neutral hiring and educational policies that look at the candidate pool irrespective of age,• forming intergenerational work teams to ensure cross-pollination across age cohorts, and
- extending continuing and professional educational opportunities to older workers.

As individuals, older workers can reach out to younger counterparts by trying new approaches such as initiating social outings, and learning to text or instant message colleagues if that's the preferred communication medium of collegial exchange.

"Most Boomers intend to work into their 70s and want to make a meaningful contribution to their employers, while staying intellectually stimulated and engaged," added Kennedy. "Age represents yet another rich source of diversity for companies seeking to leverage their investment in human capital."

About Age Lessons

Age Lessons is the pre-eminent Boomer think tank in the U.S., converting knowledge of the Baby Boomer cohort into business opportunities and policy recommendations for private and public sector clients. The company reports on Boomer needs, wants and values in five life areas: finance/money, wellness/body, values/spirit, career/work and social/play. For more information on the study, please visit www.agelessons.com.