**Tips for Instructors on How to Work Effectively with Older Workers:**

1. Take time in explaining anything new. Older workers can learn as well as younger workers if you take your time. Please do not hurry them. One major difference between younger and older workers is that older workers need a little more time to process new material and may become flustered if hurried.

2. Affirm them. Give them compliments. They may be insecure at first when dealing with new technology. You will be amazed how enthused they will become once they begin to master new technology.

3. Create an effective learning environment:
   - Make sure that there is enough light. Older workers need more light than younger workers.
   - Make sure that there are not sound disturbances. There should be good acoustics and no background noise.
   - Any printed materials should have large print and sharp color differences (i.e. yellow on black or red on white, etc. but never green on blue).
   - Older workers prefer seating that is informal, around a table, or in a circle, rather than in the usual classroom design.

4. With older persons do not extend the time of learning without time for a break for the bathroom, or just to stand and stretch.

5. Make sure that posters are at eye level because many older persons have bifocals and have difficulty looking up to read any display materials.

6. Do not assume that older workers are not computer literate. Increasingly older workers have personal computers, but… many have computer phobia and need patient guidance to overcome their fears. Once they overcome their fears and find that they can master the computer some become computer addicts.

7. One should speak clearly and slowly. A fast method of speaking may make understanding and learning difficult for some older workers. Speaking louder is not necessarily needed if one has clear diction, and normal volume. When one speaks louder one's voice naturally goes into a higher key and it is more difficult for an older person to hear higher pitches than lower pitch sounds.

**Sources:**


**Characteristics of the Older Worker:**

1. Presbyopia refers to natural age-related changes in the eyes. The aging eye has more difficulty adjusting to distance than does the younger eye. The aging eye has more difficulty reading small print. Hence material used for the older worker should accentuate the use of larger print. The aging eye also has more difficulty differentiating between certain colors. The older person finds it difficult for example, to differentiate between green and black or blue. Hence written materials and posters should be used that contrast colors such as yellow
and black, or orange and blue. Posters should always be put at eye level as after forty there is an increased probability that workers wear bifocals and with bifocals they would have to adjust their head to read posters that are put too high or too low.

2. Hearing changes with aging. High pitch is first lost in hearing as we age. It also becomes more difficult for the older person to make distinctions between sounds. In addition, the older person will find it difficult to hear well if there is background noise or distortions. The instructor should speak clearly, annunciating in a moderated voice. An increase in voice volume increases the pitch and hence what one gains in volume one loses in pitch.

3. Fluid intelligence (analytical ability – the ability to make quick calculations) may decrease in some persons as they age. Crystallized intelligence (knowledge which is learned and accumulated through experience) may increase. However, the evidence also indicates highly educated and intelligent persons may lose no intellectual abilities at all. Training of older persons should take into account that rapid need for quick calculation under pressure may be detrimental in a training/process.

4. As people age research consistently indicates a decrease in physical quickness of response and cognitive processes among older persons. What this indicates is that in teaching the older worker there must be adequate time given for them to learn the material, or to do the physical tests. Older persons should not be put into a “situation" in which they feel hurried.

5. As people age they do lose some range of motion and flexibility. Hence they will find it more difficulty to do labor that requires the flexing of their body.

6. Thermoregulation (internal body temperature) is not regulated as quickly or easily in the older person. Hence extreme temperatures in heat or coldness are detrimental to the older worker.

Sources:


This fact sheet was compiled by Project Mature Worker of the Grand Rapids Community College Older Learner Center. 8/2006