

# RECOGNIZING PATTERNS OF THOUGHT WHEN COUNSELING OLDER EMPLOYEES

1. Assume that older employees are done playing the political game of competing for promotions and career opportunities as had been done in the past. Older workers want:
  - To be recognized for performing good work.
  - To be seen as a contributor having knowledge and wisdom.
  - To be part of a team, although not necessarily carrying the weight of being the team leader.

Things to Consider: When counseling older employees, discuss how your client can find job satisfaction by talking to their manager about having meaningful job assignments so that, in turn, they can be recognized when that work has been accomplished.

2. Long service employees often have work styles and techniques that have become largely entrenched. They desire flexibility and freedom to define their own work methodology and resist both micromanagement and being told that their work methods are no longer appropriate.

Things to Consider: Discuss how your client could initiate a conversation with their supervisor related to getting work assigned by defining expected results and deadlines, rather than being micromanaged on how they should get the work accomplished.

3. More than other workers, older employees find themselves in need of flextime, vacations, and leaves in order to address personal and family issues. They often see these company benefits as entitlements and become upset when these are not granted because of the need to complete work projects.

Things to Consider: Discuss with your client, how they could engage in a conversation with their boss about their commitment to the accomplishment of goals as well as their need to address personal issues at home. Suggest that they might ask their manager to support them in problem-solving their use of time away from the job. Point out that vacations, leaves, and use of flextime are not entitlements, but rather, earned through how one performs on the job.

4. Older employees often find it difficult to understand why their younger managers lack patience. They either see these younger managers as being condescending, impatient, or overly assertive in prescribing what has to be done. Sometimes they see these younger managers putting work and money before empathy; they find it difficult relating to younger managers or supervisors.

Things to Consider: Encourage your client to engage in more cross-generational face-to-face conversations, such as at coffee breaks or lunches. Have them program it through calendaring, if all else fails. Training programs that emphasize inter-generational skill-building are also helpful.

5. Long service, older employees often do not understand that they should be building their “learning curve”, particularly in the realm of technical (computer) skills.

Things to Consider: Pointing out the implications of becoming technically obsolete tends to mitigate this attitude. Encourage them to have face-to-face conversations to discuss their commitment to learning with their manager/supervisor.

6. Older employees prefer face-to-face communications followed by telephone conversation. They are less inclined to favor Facebook, LinkedIn, blogging, tweets, and other communication methods via social networking.

Things to Consider: Encourage them to use email as well as face-to-face conversations and use of Skype or other technology (particularly if they are in a distant office environment). Point out that failure to communicate in the manner preferred by their boss and colleagues will be detrimental to their future success on the job.

7. Older employees rarely take sick days unless they truly are incapacitated; being present is a considered a job requirement.

Things to Consider: Point out that cultural work norms change over time. Indicate that they should remain home when ill and are contagious. Sick people are not productive and spread germs.

8. Longer service employees often emphasize an organization's history and traditions and cannot understand why it is not valued in companies. They believe institutional knowledge and organizational historical perspective are critical factors for an organization's success.

Things to Consider: Suggest that your older employee volunteer to be a mentor or coach to younger or less experienced colleagues. This often has the effect of invigorating older, longer service employees, while ensuring that organizational continuity and knowledge are not lost.

9. Older employees often have different values than their younger associates when it comes to loyalty to one's employer. They typically recall the days when employers cared for them and, they, in turn, went the extra mile for their employer. They are saddened to have witnessed much of that employer loyalty disappear over time.

Things to Consider: Discuss with your client that loyalty is a two-way street and that corporate caring and paternalism are not lost, rather often set aside in the interest of productivity, profit and competition. Older workers should understand this way of life. Circumstances change and a return to more compassionate management is possible, but can only be promulgated from the top of an organization.

10. Older employees grew up in an era when individual performance assessments and pay increases were dependent on their individual contributions and less on variable pay tied to the contributions of teams or the organization's performance as a whole. They are not naturally team-oriented and do not welcome team problem-solving as their younger colleagues do.

Things to Consider: Older employees should be encouraged to participate on teams even if they do not want a leadership role. Encourage them to share their self-assessment of their performance and request performance feedback from their manager and others.

11. Older employees often feel plateaued in the fulfillment of their career aspirations. They do what is requested, but tend not to volunteer their thoughts unless asked for them.

Things to Consider: Encouraging older employees to express their observations and thoughts relating to problem-solving issues often gets them more committed to achieving results and more creative in solving problems.

12. They are concerned with their long-term financial viability (savings) and their preparation for retirement. They find it difficult to save sufficiently for their longer life expectancy in retirement. Further, they are less likely to retire early or even at a time when entitled to full Social Security, having been told to wait and receive an additional 8% in Social Security benefits for each year they delay the receipt of Social Security payments.

Things to Consider: Asking older employees about their financial situation in this economy is often viewed as a “red flag”; better to learn about their personal lives through casual conversations in which you will most likely become aware of their retirement plans. Discuss alternative ways to save more. Training sessions for all age groups on the importance of creating savings, including planning for retirement is also very helpful in a larger context.

13. Older employees often hang on to their jobs even if they do not like what they are doing out of fear that they cannot find another position or to insure they can receive medical benefits which would be extremely expensive if purchased individually, rather than through their employer’s group plan.

Things to Consider: Getting to know how older employees “feel” about the economy, inflation, globalism, the stock market, and other external events will clarify how they are viewed as impacting the individual and their plans for the future. Admit that they may have to “hang on” to their jobs because finding new employment in the case of older workers is a difficult thing; you may have to indicate that ageism exists in America. You may want to brainstorm with the employee ways he/she could make the current job more interesting and meaningful.

14. Long service employees often do not have a current resume nor the recognition that they may need to have a resume that should be constantly updated for use outside the job.

Things to Consider: Raising this topic directly is another sensitive “red flag” which could be interpreted as sending a message about future downsizing or encouraging outplacement. If outplacement is planned, it is best to discuss resume preparation directly in terms of possible or probable reductions-in-force or the individual’s sub-par performance. When this topic surfaces in discussions with the employee, you may want to suggest that the individual seek out a career coach or use community career centers for help with this.