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Nurturing The Capabilities of Older Workers

Derek Waddell
9 September 2005

1) who are “older workers”:

- ◆ *those between 45 and 64, plus the few over 65, who want to remain in or rejoin the paid workforce.*

2 main groups of unemployed older workers:

(i) the white-collar workers: well educated, recent work experience,

(ii) the blue-collar, labouring or semi-skilled workers

2) main issues and problems?

- ◆ retrenched after 20 – 30 years,
- ◆ Whole vocational areas disappear
- ◆ continual change, while “old, past-it and out-of-touch”
- ◆ out of work much longer than any other age group
- ◆ Computers and IT are foreign notions rather than essential workplace tools.

White-collar unemployed need

- ◆ a safe time & space
- ◆ a range of realistic options, both short & long-term
- ◆ appropriate gap training if required

Blue Collar unemployed also need

- ◆ the chance to have a go at different things
- ◆ short-term survival goals
- ◆ lots of praise & encouragement
- ◆ 5-6 year journey goals

Frank Furedi (SMH 6/8/05)

The Culture of Fear (1997)

- ◆ *We've adopted a perspective where just about every experience is looked at in terms of the worst possible outcome*
- ◆ *The fear of taking risks*

Andrew Denton:

(SMH Spectrum, 26-27 Feb. 05):

"Optimism is not just a state you fall into. It's a force of will"

Fred's 5-year Journey

- ◆ initial Outreach course
- ◆ volunteer work
- ◆ *Working with Older People* Cert.
- ◆ more Volunteer work
- ◆ another Outreach Course
- ◆ His "*dream job*"

The steps in that student journey:

- 1) regaining hope
- 2) becoming empowered as a learner & a person
- 3) finding a niche
- 4) having a fulfilling life again

Maggie Kuhn (founder of Grey Power in USA)

There are 2 great advantages in growing old:

- 1) Most of my enemies are dead*
- 2) I can get away with saying things I couldn't say when I was young*

3) what can older workers do better than teenagers?

- ◆ people skills
- ◆ quality assurance
- ◆ mental arithmetic
- ◆ problem-solving
- ◆ concept understanding and interpretation
- ◆ use their wealth of experience

Tom Lovett

Always look for the educational opportunities in any situation

Some plusses when you the mature age & teenagers are co-students

Share different

- ◆ Strengths
- ◆ Experiences
- ◆ Perspectives

Results in:

- ◆ mutual understanding
- ◆ improved work habits
- ◆ help each other get a fairer deal

The Key Success Factors

- 1) **providing a safe time & space:**
an opportunity to think, reflect, learn, and develop ideas and dreams without criticism or ridicule
- 2) **designing and adapting courses to meet real needs and aspirations**
 - give students a say in everything!!!
 - build on strengths
- 3) **planning strategically**
- 4) **finding and nurturing suitable teachers**

What does the future Hold?

- ◆ Foster Vernon & the *Flexible Life Structures idea of the 1980s ???*
- ◆ Roy Green: *Australian employers need to sit down with workers & all other stake-holders, as has to happen in Ireland, due to EU regulations.*

Make the workplace a more attractive place

- 1) decrease fear rather than conditions
- 2) make workers feel valuable & valued
- 3) US ideas in 1970s
 - ◆ Sabbatical in mid to late 40s
 - ◆ Negotiated hours/role 45 - 70
 - ◆ Mini-shifts
 - ◆ replacement pool of retirees

What is Outreach?

- ◆ The Outreach section of TAFE NSW was established nearly thirty years ago to offer educational opportunities to disadvantaged members of the community
- ◆ Many Outreach students experience multiple barriers to learning, most are unemployed and most are very poor.
- ◆ There are 52 full-time Outreach staff, based in 43 colleges across NSW

Outreach's Mature Worker Program

- ◆ **Based on a 10-year program on the Central Coast in the 1990s**
- ◆ **Federal funding of \$2,330,000 granted to TAFE NSW from 2002 – 4,**
- ◆ **433 courses**
- ◆ **218 different locations,**
- ◆ **5,429 students**

Student outcomes include:

(6 months after graduation from these short access courses)

- ◆ 40% in paid employment
- ◆ 30% in voluntary employment
- ◆ 50% in further study
- ◆ 18% both working and studying
- ◆ 75% feeling their chances of finding work have improved
- ◆ 91 % more aware of their employment and educational options
- ◆ 93% feeling more self-confident.