

Help Wanted: It Pays to Hire Older Workers

Program reimburses up to 100%
of wages during first 12 weeks.

BY GEORGE NELSON

The payroll clerk at American Maintenance Service Inc. in Youngstown, Barbara Mann, has "definitely raised the bar for anyone coming after her," says Samantha Turner, chief operating officer of the full-service janitorial company.

"Barb is everything we could possibly need – all that in one person," she offers.

Mann, with American Maintenance since March, was no less enthusiastic about her new workplace. "I love it here," she says. "It's something different every day."



LaTasha Johnson, training specialist with the Senior Employment Center, helps mature workers find jobs.

From Page 1

Laid off after holding office manager and bookkeeping positions in area automobile dealerships over the past 40 years, Mann felt she was encountering age discrimination as she looked for work.

She was connected with her current employer through a program offered by the Senior Employment Center that offers companies incentives that hire older workers. Among them are paying for their wages and benefits for a trial period of up to 12 weeks.

The Senior Employment Center, Boardman, has offered the employer-based training program since last year, but its parent company, Mature Services Inc., Akron, has had it in place 25 years, says LaTasha Johnson, a training specialist with the center.

The program reimburses up to 100% of the candidate's wages and benefits for up to 12 weeks, the maximum training period for a prospect.

"The program has been very successful," remarks Julie Sheely, project director for the Boardman office. "Especially in the economy we have right now, it gives an employer a leg up for hiring people. They can basically try them out at no cost to them."

Participants are placed in nonprofit agencies that agree to act as program hosts, Sheely says. At the agencies, the candidates update their skills or learn new ones, "to help them get the skills they need to move into unsubsidized employment," she says. Those candidates then become eligible to be hired by companies, with the center paying up to 12 weeks of wages and benefits. The center has placed about 10 workers with companies through the program.

"We send participants out 16 hours a week [to nonprofit agencies that need services] and they're paid the prevailing minimum wage," Johnson says. "They maintain the skills they have when they come to us and also learn new skills, which helps them become more marketable in today's workforce."

The program offers benefits both for the employer and the employee. For an employer, "It helps them get a feel for the trainee before they are actually hired," Johnson explains. "That helps with turnover. Sometimes employers report that they thought that they knew this person in an interview but they really didn't and it became a bad hire."

In addition, employers deal with someone the center has trained and prescreened, "and they're dealing with mature workers as well who already have a little bit of experience in the workforce and they've been around the block a time or two," Johnson continues. "Employers want that maturity and they want that experience and the work ethic."

Prospective employees like the program because it is tailored to them. "They feel that they're valued and they have a voice here, where sometimes they feel when they try to go out on their own and seek employment they just don't have that voice, that they're overlooked for the younger worker," she says.

"Taking on an employee is always a risk, especially if you don't know much about them," American Maintenance's Turner says. "Anyone can say they can do anything in an interview, but actually seeing them work is another story," she adds. The program also provides both employer and employee the opportunity to determine whether they are a good fit for each other.

"It's a very attractive program because they basically could find us good, quality workers who wanted to work," she says. Being able to try the workers out at no cost "makes it better," she adds.

Mann, one of three employees American Maintenance has hired through the program, has "many skills and is very dependable," Turner says. To get the same grouping of skills in younger or less-experienced individuals she would have had to hire three people, she adds.

She also praises the other two employees – a supervisor and a member of the janitorial crew hired through the program. "We have nothing but rave reviews," she says.

Bill Chrystal, president and owner of Bill Chrystal Sales LLC/Northeast Tube, New Springfield, says he had been reluctant to hire, given the health of the economy, and possibly have to lay that employee off after a month or so.

Bringing someone on board at the company, which sells steel tubing, became more attractive with the help of the employer-based program.

"He's been working his butt off," Chrystal remarks, when asked about his new employee. "The economy doesn't allow much sales right now, so we'll see what happens."