

In the next few years (by 2025 in fact), the World Economic Forum [estimates that 50% of all employees](#) will need reskilling. That is why it is critical for employers of all sizes to adopt lifelong learning training and practices to maintain competitiveness and fuel innovation. Integrating lifelong learning opportunities also has the added advantage of positive impacts on employee retention, engagement and loyalty.



It can be challenging for small employers to offer training opportunities due to funding or staff size. This tipsheet provides guidance to small employers on creative ways to provide lifelong learning opportunities for their employees

Develop Age-Inclusive Learning Opportunities

Given that we live and work longer, and the workforce is more diverse than ever before, small employers must consider their approaches to employee learning and development opportunities. The goal is not to curate siloed opportunities for specific age groups, but to develop age-inclusive learning opportunities for everyone.

Get Creative About Free & Low-Cost Training Opportunities

Provide Job Shadowing Opportunities



There are many benefits to offering job shadowing opportunities, for all parties. Employers gain the benefit of attracting new talent, existing employees can build on and improve their skills and potential employees can learn new skills, observe which skills are needed for a particular role and get connected with someone within their field of interest.

Implement Interim and Stretch Assignments



Interim and stretch assignments are great strategies to keep employees engaged with their jobs by introducing new dimensions or responsibilities to their roles. Assignments such as these can cultivate a culture of learning in which workers can view their role as a skills development pipeline for future success. It goes without saying that providing professional development opportunities increases worker retention and loyalty.

Offer Low-Cost Online Options



Another low (or sometimes no) cost option to consider is online training or skills development opportunities. There are a wide variety of offerings, and it's important to do some research or vetting, but some better-known options include LinkedIn Learning, You Tube tutorials, or the AARP Skills Builder for Work. The benefit of these courses is that they are typically low cost and are administered by workforce experts, and the knowledge drawn from them tends to be evergreen.

Consider Life Stages and Provide Wraparound Supports

Allow for Flexible Schedules

With an increasingly age-diverse workforce, many workers juggle childcare, school, or caregiving responsibilities simultaneously. To build more flexibility into working hours, employers can offer adjusted work start and finish times, four-day work weeks, or allow employees to work from home or in a hybrid capacity (if possible). Flexible arrangements are highly desirable to workers and can help them fit upskilling into their schedule where it makes sense.

Offer Moral Support

Offering support to workers in difficult times goes a long way and lets them know that they are appreciated and heard. Employers can do this by checking in with employees to see how they are doing or encouraging self-care. More importantly, empowering managers to support employees who are taking time to reskill and generally promoting a culture of lifelong learning are key to the success of your upskilling initiatives.

Reassign Duties Temporarily

If possible, create space in your employees' schedules by temporarily reassigning some of their duties to other staff. This will allow them to focus on the training they are undertaking and could potentially provide a stretch assignment for the other team member!

Connect with Others

Local Small Businesses



Employers can look within their networks to learn how others in their industry or sector are incorporating lifelong learning into their culture and day to day activities. It's also possible to partner with other businesses on training programs – either to negotiate discounts or to meet any minimum enrollment requirements.

Community Colleges



Another avenue to promoting lifelong learning is through partnerships with community colleges. Most community colleges offer degree and certification programs as well as continuing education courses, making them excellent, locally-based partners for providing learning opportunities for workers.

Workforce Development Boards



Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) are part of the Public Workforce System, a network of federal, state, and local offices that support economic expansion and develop the talent of the nation's workforce. They help employers connect with each other and with training programs that help them meet workforce needs. You can search for your local WDB with [this resource](#).

Leverage Age Diversity

Build Multigenerational Teams



One of the best ways for generations of workers to learn from each other is to work together, in teams. Each generation has unique skills and perspectives to contribute to a project, and age-diverse teams are proven to be highly productive and innovative. In an inclusive environment, the knowledge sharing that occurs within teams creates informal (and free) ways to gain new skills.

Encourage Two-Way Mentoring



Workers of all ages have a lot that they can teach each other. Promoting a growth mindset among your employees – the belief that anyone can learn – helps them realize they can be both teacher and student. Provide opportunities for older workers to train younger workers in their strong skills and vice versa.

As we live and work longer, employers large and small will need to develop lifelong learning opportunities for their employees. Small employers may not have the same resources as larger companies, but there are many ways for them to provide or develop learning opportunities.

AARP offers several resources for small employers, from the [AARP Employer Pledge Program](#) to the recently launched [Small Business Resource Center](#). Both of these resources offer guidance for employers as it relates to age inclusivity and growing and scaling your business.