

# Mature-age staff bring advantages

**Fiona Smith**

**W**hen Karen Colfer was given the task of recruiting for 200 positions in a call centre in Adelaide, she knew it would be a tough ask.

It was a tight deadline, as these things often are, and that's a lot of people to find when they have to be suitable for the job, interested in the money and ready to start immediately.

"I went back to the client and said, 'We are going to have to be creative,'" says Colfer, managing director of Kelly Services Australia.

"So we adopted a model that was ground breaking: job share and actively targeting mature-age people."

(By the way, mature age these days means older than 45, which Colfer agrees is a confronting definition, if not "horrific".)

So what the Kelly crew did was start targeting places where older people spend their leisure hours, putting up fliers about the jobs in RSLs, golf clubs and advertising in the Rotary club magazine.

When they found potential recruits, they asked if they knew anyone else who might like to share a job with them.

They filled the seats in time. In terms of training, some of the recruits needed a bit more time to get used to the technology, but they got there in the end.

"In my experience, older people learn really quickly and learn well," says Colfer, who is now designing strategies to attract more mature-aged workers into the recruitment industry, where they can leverage their own work histories and contacts into a new long-term career, building relationships with clients who are likely to be of a similar age.

To attract an older job applicant, employers can discriminate on the basis of age if they do it in a positive way to increase diversity, she says.

Advertisements can depict mature-aged models and use the terms "proven track record" and "extensive life experience", rather

than the common descriptions: "dynamic" and "fast-paced" working environments.

Colfer says the advantages of employing older people are that you get the benefit of their acquired skills, life experience and they, in turn, are grateful for the opportunity.

Research also shows older people tend to have fewer days off work, are more loyal and stay longer.

"The mature-age workforce offers so much more," she says. "They have raised their families and want to be at work to enjoy the experience."

"They don't job-hop. They won't take a headhunter's call and leave for five grand more."

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Karen Colfer, managing director, Kelly Services

On the flip side, they also tend to grumble more (but maybe they have more to complain about).

Older people are commonly discriminated against at work and in the job market. Many employers are still getting their heads around the idea that the future may belong to the young, but they need their parents and grandparents right now.

Colfer says employers never say that a job applicant is "too old".

"They say that culturally, it would be difficult for this person to integrate," she says.

The issue then, for the recruiter, is to try to educate the client about the benefits of a workforce that has generational diversity.

A survey of 100,000 people (28,000 in the Asia-Pacific region) by Kelly shows that this region has the world's most positive view about people of different generations working together, with 44 per cent saying it contributes to productivity.

"We have to keep mature-age people in the workforce because we will have no one left by 2050," Colfer says.