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*Age dynamics will change the future
world of work*

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For years baby boomers have reigned supreme over the workplace. But as that generation slowly retires and makes room for younger generations, employers will see a growing dynamic at the worksite.

It is predicted that while 55 million people make up generation X, there are about 78 million baby boomers retiring in numbers of nearly 10,000 a day, according to the Social Security Administration.

That scenario is going to force employers to re-evaluate their workplace, said Emily Allen, senior adviser for the American Association of Retired Persons Foundation, who will speak at the 2007 Rocky Mountain Conference on Aging this week.

"Right now we have four generations in the workplace," Allen said. "As individuals remain (in the workplace) longer ... employers are going to have to try to meet the needs of different work styles and differences."

Though baby boomers are working longer, how they work is changing, Allen said.

"They are gravitating toward jobs that reduce their hours or reduce their work weeks," she said. "Or have them working different periods throughout the year."

But what isn't happening is dog-eat-dog competition among younger and older workers, Allen said.

"That myth needs to be dispelled," she said. "The idea that the boomers are taking away jobs from younger workers is not necessarily true. Looking at the sheer numbers, jobs are available."

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there will 10 million more jobs than employees by 2010.

"We point to statistics like that (when we hear) 'boomers should move on and let the younger generation take over,' " Allen said. "There is an overall labor shortage.' It's not a thing of someone taking the job of others."

Fields that are going to be more prone to that shortage include nursing, transportation and teaching, according to Allen.

"Part of the challenge now is with companies is they are in the now," she said. "What we are trying to get them to do is make them put in place now the implications they are going to need."

Linda Perez, employee services director for Weld County, said there is enough room in the work world for both older and younger workers.

"Right now, we have in Colorado an energy boom that is very significant," said Perez. "There is a lot of jobs out there that need a younger workforce -- high paying, physical jobs. So that workforce needs to be younger. Then there is engineering -- young people are coming in but there is such a need for high skilled jobs that there isn't competition."

But employers recognize the looming situation of a smaller generation entering the workforce.

"With an aging workforce, employers are going to be losing people and they see that," she said. "They are trying to bring new people in the workplace and keep people longer. They don't want to lose that organizational knowledge."

As the mix between younger and older workers becomes greater, the workplace is going to experience new dynamics, said John Mahaffie, a futurist with Leading Futurists, based in Washington D.C.

"Older people want to work; what is old is not old anymore," Mahaffie said. "There is a strong, powerful need for talented and capable older workers in retirement age. A lot of people are going to be in demand. The most skilled among the older are free agents. They are a great interest to employers. Right now, people will take younger workers because they are cheaper but they do not have the same depth of knowledge."

A big change that is going to happen in the workforce in the next 20 years is diversity.

"Compared to the number of white, non-Hispanic older workers, workers 20 to 25 are much more diverse," he said. "They are going to mix with older workers that are not so diverse. It's another layer of complications."

But the diversity goes beyond physical characteristics.

"Just points of views, values, ways to think of work, the idea of work is different (between generations)," he said. "You can't make older workers like younger workers and vice versa."

He said language, the idea of what is dress attire and the use of technology are other

differences that will be noticeable in the coming years.

"Employers really have to think about what is the workplace like and how can it appeal to a wide range of workers," he said. "In trying to design a workplace to appeal to a certain group, it's not going to appeal to other groups."

To go

The Rocky Mountain Conference on Aging set for Wednesday and Thursday at The Ranch. Register at the doors. For more information, call at (970) 498-6000.