

7 ways your company can help change the face of aging

by *LuAnne Speeter*

Tonight I'm having dinner with my dad at his favorite restaurant. It's a cozy neighborhood bistro that caters to his unique tastes. I already know what he'll order: liver and onions (to fortify his iron-poor blood), paired with a scotch and soda.

Dad's adamant about continuing to live in his home amid the cherished memories of my mother. My siblings and I, along with his home care providers, ensure he has the care he needs to maintain his independence. For other older adults, though, a senior housing facility may be a better option.

Empowering individualism and providing innovative senior housing choices are just a couple of the many quality of life issues we face with our burgeoning older population. Today, one in eight Americans is over age 65; by 2020 the ratio will be one in six. Our society will be challenged to accommodate their needs without dehumanizing them, combat the growing prevalence of Alzheimer's and dementia, and eradicate an insidious ageism that denies seniors respect and leaves them susceptible to social, physical, emotional and financial abuse.

Corporate America can play a critical role in promoting initiatives that advance senior issues. Why should this be important to you?

- As individuals retire from our companies, they take with them a significant share of America's knowledge and experience. Yet with today's greater longevity, many are embarking on "encore careers" after retirement. By retraining older employees and/or hiring senior consultants, you'll capitalize on the value that this cohort offers.
- More employees are acting as caregivers for aging relatives and need to find ways to balance this role with their work lives.
- Recent studies by the [Taproot Foundation](#) and other organizations show that retired Baby Boomers seek more structured volunteer opportunities that leverage their skills in order to improve their communities, ultimately benefiting local businesses.

Your company can help advance the well-being of seniors by participating in the following efforts:

1. **Promote eldercare and senior housing initiatives.** Consider partnering with a local organization to provide visitation and build one-on-one relationships with seniors. Include the organization's logo in your marketing with a link to donate money or learn more about volunteer opportunities.
2. **Invest in aging research.** We need to understand what our increasing longevity will require from society medically, economically and psychologically. Your organization may have valuable technical expertise to contribute or could sponsor a study to advance these efforts.
3. **Combat dementia and frailty.** Educate employees about how to advocate on the state and federal levels to ensure a better quality of life for aging adults.
4. **Encourage older employees and retirees to stay involved in their community and the workplace.** The report *Reinventing Aging: Baby Boomers and Civic Engagement*, a product of the Harvard School of Public Health–MetLife Foundation Initiative, discusses insights of key thinkers on ways to channel elderly skills to enhance local communities.
5. **Support caregivers.** Build flexibility into employee schedules, helping them accommodate the needs of loved ones who require home care.
6. **Fight ageism.** Do your part to improve the treatment of older adults throughout the world. Include positive images of seniors within your marketing and ensure policies and ethical standards are in place to protect senior coworkers from disrespect, harassment or being passed over for advancement.
7. **Throw out the stereotypes and redefine aging.** Record segments of PBS' [Life \(Part 2\)](#) and give employees access to viewing and enjoying them together over the lunch hour. Now in its second season, the series is a fast-paced and humorous look at being a Boomer, and how this generation is redefining aging. Segments include panels of experts and guest appearances by celebrities such as Joy Behar, David Hyde Pierce and Martha Stewart. Airing begins Sept. 16, 2009; topics include Boomer Dating, Plastic Surgery, Caregiving, Fighting Ageism and more.

Take steps now to remove the taboos and unleash the opportunities that the later years offer your company, your community, your family – and ultimately, yourself.

“We grow neither better or worse as we get old, but more like ourselves.”

May Lamberton Becker

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