

10 ADVANTAGES OF RETAINING AND HIRING OLDER WORKERS:

LESSONS FROM NYC SMALL BUSINESSES

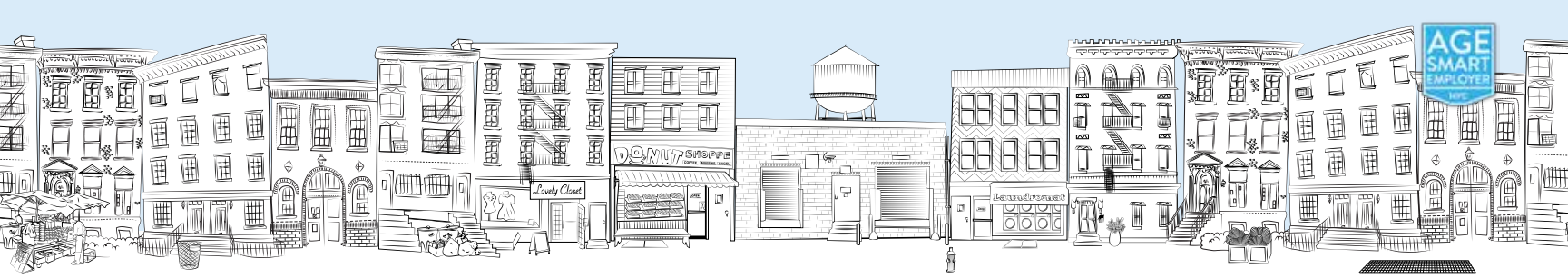


HAVE YOU RETAINED WORKERS FOR MANY YEARS? DO YOU VALUE YOUR WORKERS OF ALL AGES?

**Apply for the 2015 Age Smart Employer Awards
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and one was invited to the White House.**

The Age Smart Employer Awards—an initiative of the Robert N. Butler Columbia Aging Center and The New York Academy of Medicine, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation— addresses the needs of both businesses and older workers by:

- Researching best practices of NYC employers, especially small businesses
- Honoring employers who value workers of all ages through an awards program
- Supporting businesses interested in hiring and retaining older workers



10 ADVANTAGES OF RETAINING AND HIRING OLDER WORKERS: Lessons from NYC Small Businesses

The Age Smart Employer Awards listened to 100+ small NYC businesses share their staffing struggles and solutions. For many, older workers play an integral role in the business remaining successful and sustainable in a competitive marketplace. They know what evidence clearly shows.

1 Older workers are skilled and experienced

We heard universally that older workers bring a level of experience, critical thinking and sheer knowledge that cannot be taught. In some industries – like the jewelers, embroiderers, cabinet and cheese makers interviewed – it takes a decade or longer for workers to gain the technical skills necessary to do their job.

And then, even in industries with less technical training skills required, like **Zarin Fabrics** (Lower East Side) and **A & H Harris Equipment Rentals** (Gowanus), a small store which is part of a larger company, it can take many years for sales associates to become familiar and fluent enough with the product to be truly successful.

A manager of a nonprofit put it this way: “Young people have a can do attitude --- and make mistakes; old people know what questions to ask.”

- **International Asbestos Removal** (Flushing) owner Karen Grando says, “The experience of knowing how to get around the city. Where to park. Knowing the building managers. Knowing how to get the job done right. There really is a lot to be said for experience. It’s like playing the piano. You can be trained but it’s not the same as playing for years.”





2

They stay in jobs longer and take fewer days off

In 2014, the median tenure of workers ages 55-64 in all industries was 10.4 years, more than three times the 3.0 years for workers ages 25-34 years (US Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Businesses facing high worker turnover – like retail and restaurants which can see 100% worker turnover in a year – consistently said they prefer to hire older workers who have families to support or “a reason they have to come to work” than younger workers who come and go more frequently.

- At **Little Wolf Cabinet Shop** (Upper East Side), owner John Wolf Sr. said he did not know how long a talented worker he hired at age 60 would keep working, but that he wound up staying for another 10 years. John enticed him to stay an extra year past when he planned to retire, by asking him to spend the entire year training his son, John Jr.

3

They have a strong work ethic

Business after business spoke about older workers being the first ones to arrive for a shift, as remaining focused throughout the day and as people who rarely miss work, even in fast-paced, physically demanding businesses.

- At **Heidelberg Restaurant** (Upper East Side), a German restaurant and bar, manager Andreas Matischak said he strongly prefers to hire older workers because of their work ethic. He described Hedy, a hostess in her 60s, who has been working at Heidelberg for 40 years. “She lives to work. She wants to work. I love having her here. I have to force her to take a vacation.”
- At **Bridge Cleaners & Tailors** (Soho, Downtown Brooklyn and the Brooklyn Navy Yard), co-owner Richard Aviles, says his older workers’ work ethic is unmatched. “I find that older workers take the job more seriously. People who have endured pain in the past feel they have to prove themselves and get validation from their job.”

Aviles said while strong work ethic is on display everyday in his company, with workers arriving early and staying late, he was particularly moved when his workers pushed day and night doing every job outside their job descriptions to bring his business back to operation when they were flooded under five feet of water during Hurricane Sandy.

“Everybody showed up every though there was no production being done,” he said. “I told them there was no work to do, but that I would be there at sunrise. Two people ran out of gas coming up. They all had on gloves and boots and were scrubbing floors. They saw it as we got to get this place up and running.”



4

They retain a business's knowledge and networks

- **The Queens Tribune** (Whitestone) has retained its older advertising sales force even though workers have voluntarily reduced their hours to only a few days a week. Their older workers have retained relationships with all of the area businesses that they built up over several decades that would otherwise be lost.
- At **M & S Schmalberg** (Garment District) employee Lucia grew up in the business—literally, starting to come in as a child with her mother. “She has more of an understanding of the business than anyone,” said owner Adam Brand. “Lucia is one of the few people that really understands [all parts of the business]. She facilitates things. She’s a help to me. She has an awareness of what’s going on. She’s easily the most valuable person here.”
- At **Bartleby and Sage** (Long Island City), Chefs Jorge and Alfonso have been with the restaurant part of the business, Sage General Store, for over 15 years.

BARTLEBY AND SAGE (Long Island City)

“They just know their way around the kitchen. New chefs can have a hard time fitting in because the same recipes have been done for 17 years. Consistency is incredibly valuable financially.”

- Greta Poretsky, Event Catering Coordinator





5 The perceived technology gap can be overcome

Because older workers did not grow up with computers and the Internet, they can be perceived as slower or more resistant. Businesses who have expected all workers to adapt to new technology and provide support versus allowing some to lag behind, report better success, as do those who “think about the team,” pairing workers with stronger and weaker technology skills together.

- Nadine Cino of **Tyga-Box Systems** (Midtown), a green moving company that rents out reusable plastic boxes and coordinates moves, applied for and received a grant to train her warehouse workers (hired through a program for those formally incarcerated) in using a new digital tracking system.

“We would have just handed them an apple iPad – you can’t do that to people who have never used a computer,” she said. “Now they are giving us advice on how we use technology.”

- At **Kossar’s Bialys & Bagels** (Lower East Side), Leila, 55, the counter woman, is considered the “heart and soul of the store” and has been working there for 16 years. When the business was bought by new owners, she learned that they were switching over to a POS electronic system at the cash register.

“She said you should just fire me now,” recalled Kossar’s new owner Evan Giniger. The owners encouraged Leila to try and offered training. She is now on her second new POS system and is operating faster than anyone else in the store.

- At **The International Preschools** (Manhattan) all teachers are expected to use iPads, upload photos and make regular posts to the school’s website. The school’s director Donna Cohen pairs teachers who are not as comfortable with technology in classrooms with assistant teachers who are, to provide support.





6 Older workers prove that the best teams are multigenerational

There is evidence that mixed age teams in the workplace are more productive than teams of workers of the same age (Zwick, Göbel and Fries (2013)).

- At **B & D Heating** (Gowanus), owner Bill Munks uses a mixed age team to retain one of his most valuable workers, Mario, 79. “He’s head strong, stubborn and brilliant,” Bill said. “I hire a special guy who goes with him and treats him like a father... They are a great pair.”
- At **Renewal Care Partners** (Midtown), which provides home health care and companion services to older adults, older and younger workers are intentionally paired together to learn from and compliment each other.

7 Older workers play a critical role in training the next generation of workers

- **Riva Precision Jewelry** (Sunset Park), a high-end jewelry manufacturer, facing a shortage of skilled workers, uses current workers to train new hires who have less than optimal skills. The company pays incentives to its Master Jewelers who train others and leave the production line to make up for incentives they would otherwise get for exceeding production targets.
- At **Havana Central** (Times Square), a 59-year-old dishwasher sets the standard for the rest of the kitchen and trains less experienced dishwashers who come in. He is rewarded with higher pay and bonuses. “There are expectations that you have to be as good as him. You have to keep up with him,” said owner Jeremy Merrin.
- At **Mager and Gougelman** (Midtown), custom manufacturers and fitters of ocular prostheses, practitioners must commit to taking on apprentices in order to guarantee continuation of the profession, as there is no formal training school and skills are passed down through lengthy apprenticeships.

MASTER FIRE PREVENTION (East Tremont)

“When you have someone there 15 years and you bring a new person in, you want that person to know everything, but they don’t. It is great to have the seasoned employees teach the new employees.”

- Peter Martinez, owner



8

They provide customers with consistency and personal attention

Businesses frequently spoke about how their customers appreciate seeing long-time workers and feel that their presence sends the message that the business values its workers, its customers, and its community

- At **Glaser's Bake Shop** (Upper East Side), Terri is known for her extensive knowledge of the store's offerings. She greets all of her regular customers by name, knows their families, and gives them samples of their favorites.
- At **Totonno's Pizzeria Napolitana** (Coney Island), which promotes itself as the oldest continually run, family-owned pizzeria in the U.S., beach goers expect to see the same people behind the counter every summer as a part of their seasonal pilgrimage. In winter the shop is filled with regulars who often know the owner and workers by name.

- **Ottomanelli & Sons Meat Market** (Village) owner Frank Ottomanelli says their business is based on consistency across generations. "We're a one-on-one butcher," he said. "We've been to our customers' weddings and funerals. We get attached."

One Ottomanelli customer during a recent visit said, "I've been coming here forever. I started as a little girl with my Mom. I don't buy my meat anywhere but here. When my Mom passed two years ago, I lost her recipes. Frank gave me his recipes."





9 Older workers attract more business

There are 1.4 million older New Yorkers and 4 million older tourists who visit New York every year. Older adults hold the majority of the country's discretionary income, and are a growing customer base for the City's businesses.

- At **Katz's Delicatessen** (Lower East Side), some older customers request that only the older workers prepare their orders. Younger customers catch on, and desiring the authentic experience of the New York landmark, request this as well, said Katz's owner.
- At **Rudy's Music Stop** (SoHo and Hell's Kitchen), the store's consumer base is such a large age range (teenagers to people in their 70s), that the owner prefers to have workers who can relate to all ages and understand their customers' experiences.
- At **Brooklyn Swirl** (Bedford-Stuyvesant), a frozen yogurt shop, older customers are seen as both valuable in themselves and connectors to their younger family members. Owner Jean Alerte has instituted a half-price discount and hired an older worker behind the counter to make older customers feel particularly valued and welcome.
- Even at the not-so-small **Apple Store** (Upper West Side) older workers are strategically placed toward the front of the store so customers who might be overwhelmed by technology or the environment feel more comfortable."





10 Older workers are part of the business brand

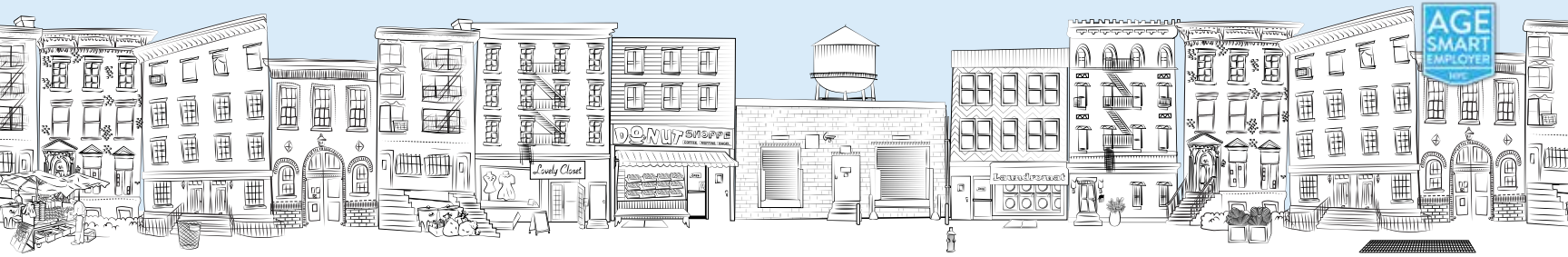
Many businesses — from **Kossar's Bialys & Bagels** (Lower East Side) to **Beecher's Handmade Cheese** (Flatiron) to **Steinway & Sons pianos** (Astoria) — spoke about older workers being a symbol for products that are hand-made, custom-made or carry a history.

Other businesses spoke about older workers' knowledge and personalized customer service becoming a part of their brand. Older workers at **Rudy's Music Stop** (SoHo and Hell's Kitchen,) who share their experience of music and changes in the guitar and music industry over several decades with customers, become a welcome part of the experience of visiting the store.

- At **The Shadowbox Theatre** (Downtown Brooklyn), a theater that puts on shows for 27,000 children a year, promoting intergenerationalism has become a part of the product. The theater's founder Sandra Robbins intentionally hires musicians and actors of different ages and backgrounds. They include a musician in his 50s who has been with the theater for 20 years and a longtime African drummer in his early 70s who performs with actors in their 20s and 30s.

"I think it is very important for children to see people in a range of ages working together. For children to see people with different ethnic backgrounds working together. Part of the philosophy of Shadow Box is really that kids can make identification that is broad- ranged," Robbins said.





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