



## LIVING, LEARNING & EARNING LONGER

A COLLABORATION FROM **AARP**  
**OECD**  
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# Supportive Conversations with Your Workers as they Age at Work

This information is provided to support you as an employer as you make decisions about your future workforce and engage in conversations with your employees about their future aspirations.

**Making decisions as you assess your organization post-COVID-19 can be very hard, as can conversations on the topic with staff whom you know well.**

Understanding some of the myths about aging and how people's choices are being shaped by living longer can be useful in preparing for conversations with employees. It will also help in knowing how to support employees as you and they face the future together.

Thinking of work and retirement as separate stages in the course of life no longer accurately mirrors the reality for a substantial proportion of the population. The very notion of retirement as we have known it is being challenged. As alternative pathways become more apparent, increasing numbers of people are engaging in new forms of activity, contribution and enterprise as they age. Here are some simple ideas to consider when having conversations with employees about transitions regarding retirement discussion, layoffs or other circumstances that may require delicate navigation.

## THINGS TO REMEMBER



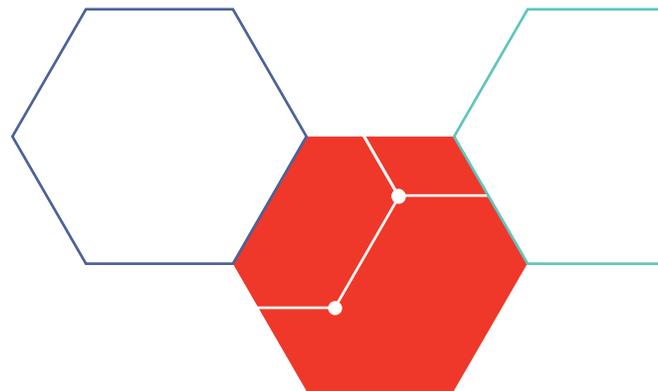
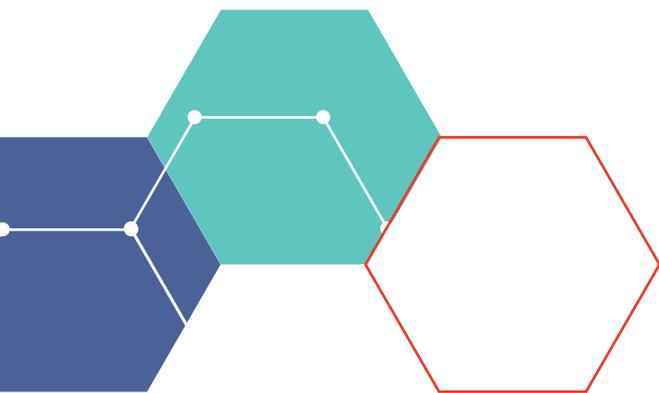
**No one size fits all.** As people age, they are making choices not on the basis of their chronological age but on self-perception—that is, the way they see themselves. Basing our assumptions on the age of a worker can be very misleading. Be aware that many stereotypes about older workers are simply inaccurate. Some older people are working longer than in the past because they are not sure what the alternatives to work could be or they are heavily invested in their jobs. For others, it's out of necessity—they need to make money to survive or save for retirement. Some simply enjoy the work that they do, including the social aspects, and feel valued. And there are still others who are keen to leave as soon as possible as work becomes harder or less stimulating. No one size fits all regarding the appetite for leaving or remaining in paid work.



**Design the next phase together.** What matters in choosing the shape of the next life phase at any age is having a sense of connectedness, purpose, and making a contribution that is valued. This is an opportunity for your company to support its employees in designing and creating successful futures.



**Have supportive conversations.** Fear is the most common reason for avoiding the conversations we know we need to have—fear of getting it wrong, upsetting the other person, not having all the answers, raising expectations, or creating a precedent. If we acknowledge that we may feel uncomfortable, and that the employee may also be anxious about the conversation, things are likely to go better. Seeking to be supportive and sensitive, and communicating the purpose as exploring their needs is a good starting point. Avoid setting out to find solutions or make any final decisions in one conversation. Conversations can take time to unfold.



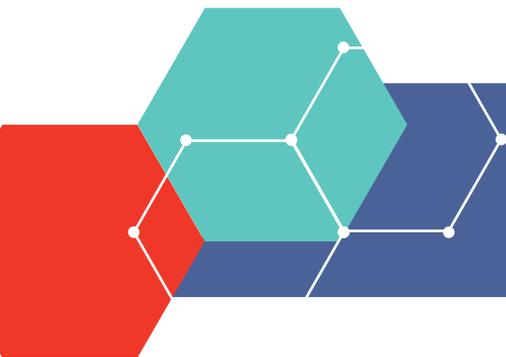


### Follow a four-stage process.

- Set up the meeting. Arrange a confidential space and prepare by finding out what policies, legal and other boundaries there may be. To reduce anxiety, explain the purpose is to explore the employee's thinking about the next stage. Avoid a focus on "moving on" or using the term 'retirement' unless they raise it first.
- Start the conversation. Set a warm relaxed atmosphere. Make the employee feel valued and ask what is important for them to talk about regarding their next stage. Pay attention to your language and voice, communicate empathy and warmth, be sensitive and supportive, and avoid assumptions and rushing ahead.
- Explore the issue and options. Avoid coming with preconceived ideas. Seek to listen and fully understand the employee's circumstances and aspirations—they may not be what you think. Ask open-ended questions. Accept that the employee may not have thought through all the options nor made any concrete decisions. On the other hand, they may already have a definite plan. Aim to be clear on their needs and how you can provide support.
- Agree on next steps and when to have a follow-up discussion. Summarize the discussion to let the employee know you have heard and understood him or her. Agree on what actions you will both take and when to follow up. Do not rush the discussion; be open to adjourning and reconvening later, after some reflection. You are not likely to have a final plan agreed on after one conversation.



**Always remember that visibility impacts your culture and your brand.** Remember that the way in which you interact with and support your workers is widely visible to other employees, their families, and the wider community. Treating employees fairly and respectfully can significantly impact staff engagement and your brand.



For more information on COVID-19 and its impact on the 50+ population, visit [aarp.org/coronavirus](http://aarp.org/coronavirus).



This guidance has been prepared by AARP and Partners in Change.

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