Work and Retirement

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Each of us brings to our job, whatever it is, our lifetime of experience and our values.

Sandra Day O'Connor

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the chapter, readers will be able to:

1. Describe the characteristics of the older work force.
2. Discuss forms of employer-sponsored wellness programs for older workers and their value in enhancing work performance.
3. Discuss issues of work performance of older workers.
4. Describe characteristics that contribute to continuing competence of older workers.
5. Describe mechanisms for retraining older workers.
6. Describe issues related to decisions to retire and adjustments to retirement.
7. Discuss the development of retirement preparation programs and alternatives to retirement.
8. Discuss issues related to unemployment among older workers.

The study of aging and work, focusing on the employment and retirement issues of middle-aged and older workers, is called industrial gerontology (Sterns & Alexander, 1987). The aging of the work force creates unique issues—choosing to work longer, early retirement options, staffing shortages, career patterns, training and retraining, performance, productivity, and health and disability (Sterns & Hayck, 2001).

Whether older workers continue to occupy their present jobs or change jobs will be determined by their career choices, retraining, experience, health, and retirement preferences. Older workers are in direct competition with younger workers for some positions and will be needed to fill positions when there is a shortage of younger workers. Competent, able, older workers who desire to continue to work need to be competitive in the workplace of the future.

In this chapter, issues and research relevant to enhancing the work and retirement experience of older adults are explored. Current data regarding the employment patterns of older workers are provided. The role of health as a determinant of employment and retirement and related research issues are discussed next. Interventions such as wellness programs are also described.

Discussion then turns to issues such as older worker performance, obsolescence, and competence. Training and retraining and other
Edition 3

Functional Performance in Older Adults

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