

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Angela, Jane, thank you for joining me. I really want to talk about this older demographic in the workforce. More and more, the workforce is being made up of older people, so it's very important that we talk about it, and we'll get to more specifics about women and race in a moment, but let's set the stage about the older population in the workforce today.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

I'm so glad that we're having this very important conversation because it's a conversation that's often not on the first tip of the tongue when people talk about workforce and workforce development. They're not looking at the older worker. And we do know Department of Labor statistics show by 2030 that a quarter of our workforce will very well be the older workers, those people 50 and above. And they're going to be a vibrant part of our workforce. And the question that we need to start asking ourselves and really changing the narrative about how we look at those workers, those older workers. Are we actually meeting the moment with them and are we actually looking at making sure that they're trained and upskilled for the future of work and the jobs of tomorrow? And I don't think that's a discussion that's really happening enough, even though at the Center for Workforce Inclusion and the Center for Workforce Inclusion Labs, we are trying to be on the forefront of those discussions. But not everybody's brain is trained that way when we consider the workforce.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

Angela, I just couldn't agree more. I mean, I know we both share a love for the Center for Workforce Inclusion and the Labs, but the reality is most employers think that by the time a worker reaches a certain age, and sometimes that can be as young as 40, they're sad. They shouldn't need anything else. So they deliberately exclude them from professional development. They exclude them from promotional activities. And I think those actions just are multiplied when they hit 50 and 55 and God forbid, 65. So, I know we're nodding heads here, it's so – prevalent, and you're exactly right, nobody's talking it. It's why Gary is such a forward thinker at Center for Workforce Inclusion because he keeps pounding this home.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Absolutely. And Jane, I'm not sure if you saw this or not, but a recent AARP study that came out where they surveyed workers 45 and older. Two out of three say that they have experienced age discrimination on the job and they're currently employed. And it's oftentimes that the employer doesn't take the time and invest in that older worker because they think that they might be untrainable or it costs too much to train them or that they might be aging out of that employment place anyway. So all of these unconscious biases take place with the older worker that really... You're clearly missing out on a very vibrant part of the workforce.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That always drives me crazy when I look at programs, because here at WorkingNation, as Jane well knows, and you know we really look at all these different training programs out there to try to keep people up to date on the skills they need today, tomorrow, and that those programs don't include those older workers. It amazes me because these are people who have the institutional memory, they have the probably problem solving skills already because they've been through this. I don't understand why an employer would overlook this talent base.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

Well, I mean, I think they take older workers for granted in one specific way. They think they're static. Yes, Ramona, I agree. They think they're static in terms of they can't learn as fastly as a younger worker. But they think they're going to stay in the job because they don't want the hassle of going to look for another job. And I think they should wake up because I think they're wrong about that. I think older workers... I look at myself, I've changed jobs probably four times since I was 40. And I think that's more and more the rule rather than the exception.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

I agree. You see those people over 40, 45, they're reinventing themselves constantly. And actually, they have a really great work ethic. The generations that have come after the boomers or whatever, their work ethic is a little bit different. They're looking at the world from almost a cause marketing perspective. They want to know the cause. They're more into the mission of the organization. They're very discerning, and there's a lot of gig economy taking place. So you don't see those workers really in it for a career. So that tradition is dissipating as we get to these younger generations. But you have this older worker that's really can be the most loyal person in your company that you're totally overlooking and not giving opportunities to. And also, it's not only just re-skilling them for those entry level jobs, but also middle management and management jobs.

And I know that this might be later on in our conversation, but you even look at how we are trying to employ people now, and the way that we even look at putting out an application has been discriminatory against the older worker. When you look at the Age Employment Discrimination Act, if you look at that, you're not supposed to put in that bias language that would discriminate against the older worker, but yet we see platforms out there, and I won't name who they are, that actually allow employers to segregate who they're going to show that ad to. So therefore, the older worker doesn't even see the opportunity for the job. And that has to change. That has to be that people have to understand that that is really doing a disservice to our entire economy, in fact.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

~~Yeah.~~ It's baffling to me because on one hand we're saying, "Oh, older workers can only do certain things." Except, you look at CEOs of the Fortune 1500 companies. They're not 35. You look at college presidents, again, not 35. You look at all the coaches of the winning college and professional teams, again, not 35. So if we can see older workers in those kinds of long-held leadership positions, why can't we see them everywhere?

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Exactly.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

I mean, they should have equal access. Yes, some of them need to change careers and change sectors, so they're going to have to lose some tenure and go back to more entry level jobs. But why wouldn't we look at them? They have the durable skills. Every employer I talk to says, "I can teach them what they need to know on the job, but I need durable skills." Who better than an older worker who's made these transitions to say, "I'm the poster person for durable skills."

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Absolutely. And I think that as a nation, we need to change how we think about aging, and that we need to embrace aging as vitality, or aging with vitality. When we see anti-aging, we're putting so much hostility towards aging that we're really putting an impression with people that it's not good to age. And we need to start changing the way that we use language around aging as well.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

We need to blow up. I'm having a senior moment. I'm having a senior moment should say, not in my case, but should be like, "I'm skiing down a hill." Or for me, I'm speaking at a great conference. That's a senior moment.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Hallelujah. I think that's the best way I've ever heard that put. Something you said though made me think those CEOs that you see, those older CEOs, most of them are men. There are very, very few female CEOs older, in the older demographic. So that brings us to part of the conversation I wanted to get to is women, older women in the workforce, I think they still make up a lot of the jobs that are frontline. We saw that in the pandemic. A lot of the healthcare jobs. Some of those pay well, but many of them don't pay as well as other jobs. So what are you seeing, what's the trend now with older women in the workforce?

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Well, I see older women in the workforce are really caught between a rock and a hard place. If we look at those jobs that were lost as a result of Covid, those were a lot of those hospitality service jobs where people were just surviving but not necessarily thriving. And at the center we've talked about that, Gary Officer has talked about the great shedding where you have people, it wasn't the great resignation, people didn't resign and not come back. You actually had people who resigned and they were asked back, and a lot of those tended to be older workers. And especially where you have women who are now in that rock and a hard place with not multi-generational responsibilities, that they're taking care of people younger in their household and older in their household, and yet they do not have the wealth or the discriminatory wealth to even deal with essential expenses or plan for retirement. And they don't have the skills now.

We always talk about this wealth gap, and we know there's a wealth gap between women and men. We know there's a wealth gap between the white Americans and people of color. But with that comes the opportunity gap that also exists, and that we have to look at how do we create opportunities to increase economic security for not only women, but marginalized populations as a whole and for every American, quite frankly. And so we really need to start looking at that and looking at that workforce and how we need to upskill them and get them ready for the future of work. And when we talk about discrimination, it's interesting. If you look in artificial intelligence and tech jobs, there aren't a lot of women that are in high level management positions. I think maybe 20% of those jobs are women. And then if you look at the management and... In fact, Gary Officer and Polly Allen, who's on our board at Center for Workforce Inclusion Labs, just wrote an article on this and about how the disparity exists. And so the struggle is real.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

Yeah. I think that it's impossible to look at the data and not call out that the opportunities post-covid for women are much reduced. And when you add women of color, really reduced. Absolutely at the lowest entry level kinds of low wage jobs. But I think people are missing the fact that there were lots of women, lots of women of color who were in middle management positions in leisure and hospitality, in retail. Think of a store, a Kohl's, a Neiman Marcus, whatever, lots of women of color in those positions, and they had to stop out when those stores closed. They haven't been called back yet at that level or above.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

~~No.~~

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

And they've had a very difficult time making that same even-leveled transition into that middle management position in other sectors. I think that's a real mistake. We as a country are in a management deficit right now. And these folks who were in management positions prior to Covid and have not been able to come back in their sector, have those management skills. They could translate those to places where we have real demand now.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Absolutely. And then we also have jobs that will be going away that they were in. So if we're looking at those service jobs, as technology becomes more pronounced in our economy, we're going to see jobs dissipate. And now we have people who are not skilled to take on the jobs of the future. So, how do we make sure that they can thrive? And that's another thing that we're not looking at from a holistic perspective as a country, but we're trying to do that in our conversation here and with the work that you guys are doing at WorkingNation and what we're doing at the center.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

Yeah, and Angela, it's so funny, we had a meeting for WorkingNation this week, and we were talking about ChatGPT and I had a list of jobs that were likely to be severely reduced, not completely obliterated, in the next five years. And while we think of the checkers at our grocery store and our pharmacies and things like that, one of the jobs on that list was a paralegal. Paralegal, that profession has been a great job, highly educated, but it's been a great way for women and people of color to come in and say, "Let me see if I want to be a lawyer before I invest in that, let me try this." And whether they went on to law school or not, they were paid. Many of them pay six figure wages. So what happens when that opportunity for so many women goes away?

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Exactly, exactly. And that's what we're dealing with. Ramona, it'd be remiss if we didn't talk about the education gap and where workforce training can really come to play. Because if we really look at the Black community, 80% of the Black community do not have four-year degrees, 80%, almost 80%. And so where we see that's not the same in the white community. And that translates to getting that higher paying job.

But when we look at training and workforce development, there are so many viable jobs that are really well paying that don't require four-year degrees necessarily. And that we really need to look at that population and really look at where we can train them. A lot of AI jobs, and we're not doing that as well. And the thing is, when we talk about workforce development, we're always going to the youth. And I agree with that pipeline for feeder market into workforce development training programs, but well, I'll

say almost never, a conversation about workforce development training and older people. You look at the workforce development boards all across the country, they're always looking at that pipeline of the youth market coming out of high school. What are we going to do to get them into those well paying vocational jobs? We never look at the older worker for that.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

And the case in point that's so clear is the country is on fire about the word registered apprenticeship. And you look at every registered apprenticeship, they're young people. Disproportionately men, but young. And how crazy is that? I mean, who needs an earn and learn program more than an adult who already has the responsibilities of a car payment, a rent, a mortgage payment, family responsibilities? There is absolutely no reason that you couldn't have registered apprenticeship programs that are geared to mid-career changers. There's no reason.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Absolutely.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So what is the government's role? What is the policy role in this? I know there are laws against discrimination in the workplace, but are they enough? Where do we go from here to make sure that we give those opportunities to folks, women, women of color, older women of color?

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

I know Jane has some thoughts about lowering the SCSEP requirement of age, but I think that also, I mean there's laws, but I think it comes down to enforcement of laws. And when we look at the Employment and Age Discrimination Act, we look at those things, are we really enforcing that? I know there was a big scuttlebutt a couple years ago about these social media platforms and the ability that employers have to just discriminate out who gets to see that ad. And also the type of language. There was a study that was done by the University of California Irvine with the University of Liverpool, I think it was last year. And they went out and they did little test ads on the jargon that used. You see things like, "We want you here, but you must have three to seven years of experience, no more than seven years." So you're already putting somebody that's older out of the mix.

And there needs to be some really good enforcement of looking how not only the algorithms, but how those ads are worded so that that people don't look at it and automatically dismiss it or walk away and say, "That's not for me." They want you to be a communicator. You need to know what's going on in that industry right now, and you have to be a dynamic communicator. I mean, all those things that they put forth into those ads make a older person walk away. And I'm not saying that's everybody, but those ads are out there. And I think enforcement needs to take place where you're really going to be accountable for how you're looking at hiring employees.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. The problem with federal legislation is that there needs to be enforcement. And over the last seven or eight years, the federal agencies have been decimated. Agencies like Wage and Hour and those that enforce the Fair Labor Standards Act and the Older Americans Act. I'm kind of conflicted, and there's surprise on this. There's a thin line between helping getting us to do what's right as a country, and overregulation. I don't think that businesses can thrive if we tell them too critically what they can and can't do. But I think in saying that, number one, age discrimination is illegal. And

people should feel very comfortable saying that they have some proof that they've been discriminated against because of their age.

And I never want the... Angela, we've had this conversation before. I mean, my concern about the Older Americans Act when it comes to SCSEP is that as more and more places, local areas, have increased their minimum wage to a living wage, many poorer older people have made more money and have saved it and have made dedicated decisions to make sure they had some cushion in their retirement years, that could hold them back from getting one of these SCSEP jobs. So I think the policy makers need to look at, is it time to raise the ceiling, the wage cap on SCSEP? And as the population grows, do we need to put more money into that program to address the growing numbers of people that fit within that definition?

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

And I think now is a great time to ask that question and have them look at it because \$200 over the poverty line does not a wealthy person make. And also we have this inflation that's been taking place. So more of the money is leaving the... There's no cash flow in these marginalized populations. So it even is a greater disparity. And I agree with you. I completely agree with you.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

If the workforce development program's not out there for an older woman of color, what can that person do?

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

At the labs, we really try to look at doing demonstration projects where we can see if we throw something at the wall, we want to see if it sticks. And one of the things that, as we're becoming a more technical economy, is that do we have the digital literacy skills out there in these populations that we need to upskill? And the answer is not necessarily. I don't want to use the word, everybody says digital competency, and I think people are used to being on phones and things like that. But are they really used to navigating with digital skills for what's going to be a hybrid remote job? We know that 75% of the jobs in the next few years are going to probably be hybrid, remote, and at least remote workers will be home at least five days out of a month working remotely. So, do we have the skills in those populations to really be able to capture those kind of jobs?

In addition, we're not only looking at doing hours and hours of training with an instructor for those digital skills, but also the softer skills. So even though you might never have worked remote before, so how do you understand the time management and the project management skills so that you're productive in that home environment? And that is so important. So the one thing that we really want to look at is holistic. So you don't just give them training and say, "Go out into the world and good luck." We want to give them training and say, "This is also what you need so you can thrive and be productive." But also, there's another part of it. Where's that pipeline going for the employer? And so we also want to partner with employers that once we have folks who are trained, that they can go through and then also get a job so they can thrive.

This digital competency program that we've done was really launched in Pennsylvania. And I think about seven out of 10 of those that went through it got really good jobs in customer service and things like that, and they're thriving. So that's what we really want to try to put forth. We also are looking at train the trainer. So there's trainers out there across the country that we want to make sure that we enable them to be able to train even more people. And it's part of our Pathways to Employment program that we're doing at the center as well. So we're excited about it. It's still in its infancy stage, but we're ready

to get going. And we really hope in three years that there will be tens of thousands of folks that have participated in Pathways to Employment.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

Yeah, and CWI is such a leader in this. Not only do they want to create innovation for themselves, but they've reached out to really partner with everybody else who even has a slight thought, not only a leadership thought in this, but is interested at all in this population. I want to go back, Ramona, and just talk about some solutions because there's some things out there I think that are really impressive. In the Black community, the sororities are amazing. The AKAs and the Deltas, they're all college educated people. But they have for decades worked with their members about leadership skills, about refining your resumes, about honing your pitch. I think they're amazing. And if people knew the great work that they'd be doing, they'd be stealing their secret sauce. I think that the National Urban League really has a push in this area now. They get it. They see that as Black men and women try to really build wealth, they hit a roadblock somewhere in their fifties. They get laid off.

How do they get back on that wealth train so that they can have a happy retirement and leave a legacy to their family? And finally, I would say, I mentioned that Gary has pulled all these groups together. I mean, he's working with NICOA and AARP and making sure both of them have different kinds of outlets to their members, making sure that work is a part of their message. Not just healthcare, not just retirement planning, not just insurance, long-term care insurance kinds of things, but work. And I think he's done a wonderful job bringing work to the table, both at NICOA and AARP, so that they're talking about it much more openly.

And I said finally, but I will say one more thing. Gary has pushed to have a panel at the National Workforce Boards Association this year. That's all the public workforce system. Many of them are over 50. These exec directors of the local One Stops. So getting them to see that people who are the same age, they are maybe a different gender or a different color, but they have skill too. I think it's starting to make a difference and it's going to make a greater difference moving into the future.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

And you bring up a good point about what we're trying to do at the Center and the Center for Inclusion Labs is these convenings because we talk about solutions, but first you got to admit you have a problem, and not everybody understands the problem. So, one of the things that we have been doing is pulling thought leaders together, policy leaders, to really educate and talk about the problem. We just had our first equity summit this past year that went really well. We have another one coming up in the fall. Gary has interviewed the Marty Walsh, the secretary of labor. We've had various congressional representatives in addition to thought leaders in this space. I mean, we moderated a conversation between the head of the Goldman Sachs Foundation and the National Congressional Black Caucus Foundation to discuss the future of women, particularly Black women in work.

So, we need all of these various stakeholders to take part of the conversation and then really develop the solutions. But we're going up this parallel path. We're putting out projects and we're putting out initiatives, but we're also in the same time holding these convenings and coalescing and collaborating with like-minded stakeholders to really amp this conversation up so it becomes forefront and top of mind for those who are making the decisions.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So as we wrap up, I would ask both of you to tell me what is the one or two most important things that we could do to be more inclusive? Just a wrap up on your thoughts to be more inclusive and bring in this

older population, older women, older men. Let's include everybody of all races, all genders into the workforce today, because we definitely need them. We have openings, we need them.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Well, I think that it goes back to that diversity, equity, and inclusion concept, which is look around the room when you're thinking about something and does everybody look like you? And if they do, then you've got a problem. You should really venture to be curious about people who don't look like you, who don't come from the same cultures as you do, and to really reach out and to broaden your horizons. It's got to start with that initiative. And it's also, it's a culture. It's a culture that needs to be created. So as we have those... And I'm going back, I sound like a broken record, to making sure that this is going to be top of mind for people because as we're in various convenings and workforce development board meetings and things like that, this has to be part of the agenda, has to be part of the topic.

With HR professionals, it has to be part of the topic and the agenda that are we looking... Because everybody's got their first level of DEI. They're looking at people of different colors, different backgrounds. But the ageism part is still trailing the rest of the DEI success, so to speak. It's a part that often is not thought about. They're looking at, do we have people of diverse backgrounds, diverse genders or gender preferences, all of that. But nobody's thinking about the older worker. Do we have older workers here? And that has to be part of our national conversation.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

Yeah, I so agree, Angela. I mean, I think there are two things that I would like to part with. One is we really need to start a conversation with businesses who have mandatory retirement ages. I mean, we know some family recognized names that tell people at 60 that their career is over at that entity. And we need to call that out and we need to talk about why. What's the rationale behind that? And second of all, we need to really do a marketing push to this. I always worry about the lowest, the neediest, the people that are retiring who really are going to be hungry if they don't get something. The people we talked about with SCSEP. But the reality is there's a lot of older workers who have been middle management and above, forced to retire for whatever reason. Let's get them back into jobs in the nonprofit sector.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Absolutely.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

I mean, I think the Robin Hood Foundation in New York does such a great job, and it should be done all over the country of getting people who were CEOs, who were COOs, who were now CIOs to go into the nonprofit community and really use their years of learning and experience to do good for these nonprofits who are really struggling. They just don't have access to that talent.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Absolutely. And I also think that the economy might also come into bear here since a quarter of the workforce will be older workers. Employers might have no choice but to look at this workforce because that is what's in front of them. So, some of those real sobering statistics need to be elevated as well, so they understand where their workforce will be coming from in the demos that they have.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

Great point.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Jane, Angela, thank you for spending time with me.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Thank you Ramona, it's been great.

Jane Oates, WorkingNation president:

Thanks Ramona.

Angela, always great.

Angela Beddoe, CWI Labs board chair:

Yeah, you too. Thank you.