

# Company veterans provide an invaluable legacy for future generations

Debbie Nicol

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UAE [corporate leaders](#) often face a challenge with those employees with retirement on the horizon. Some may refer to these people as simply attending the workplace rather than producing results, believing that if they keep their head down, they'll make it to the end.

These long-serving employees have often given much of their lives to the corporation, and when they leave so too does the highly-valued tacit knowledge that simply can't be found elsewhere. This represents an element of the company's intellectual property; after all, if an employee leaves, it should not be the downfall of a company. So what can a leader do to convert the last few years into not only a more enjoyable, respectful and productive time for these employees but also a time to "capture and bottle" that tacit knowledge.

Let's focus first on the reality of the soon-to- retire long-serving employee. A typical profile of such a person may include amazing accolades from the early days of the company's set-up. The person is likely to be able to share in vivid detail the "good old days" when a business practice was performed with heart.

These captivating stories hold the key to the roots of today's corporate success, possibly a place from which the company values emerged. For example, today's corporate value of "spirit" may have come from an earlier time when unique practices or unofficial and informal protocols existed.

One example could be before loading the goods at the dock, it was tradition to go to the home of the customer and exchange drinks. Another may be a successful trader who decorated his shop with gifts from faraway lands, hence showing enthusiasm towards people from differing parts of the region.

Second, focus on the organisation, one that has grown well beyond those good old days; it now has a generation of new starters, seeing life through a changed lens. Modern-day key performance indicators and corporate targets couldn't possibly allow for the practice of exchanging drinks in a home, or expecting international gifts, yet these new team members are introduced to the value of "spirit".

So what could happen when the long-serving, soon-to- retire employee is integrated into the orientation process, being chief storyteller of the company's humble beginnings?

This is exactly what happened in one local organisation with surprising results:

- The soon-to-be retirees were proud and passionate corporate ambassadors and chief storytellers
- The new generation of employees were captivated by the way things used to be

- The bridge became the tacit knowledge, now shared and captured

This is important for a number of reasons:

1. When stories are shared, many key historical points can be extracted, such as the way work used to be performed and why, the milestones that were achieved and the influence they had on today's modus operandi, along with the people and personalities that have shaped the company.
2. When a new generation enters any entity, it brings with it hopes and expectations for the future. The past seems irrelevant — until a connector comes along that highlights how today and tomorrow are a product of the past, some of which was left behind and some that has come to where we are today.
3. When stories are shared, not only do new employees gain a deeper understanding of why the company is what it is today, but also an appreciation that others can be the key to future success. Not only does airing this tacit knowledge fuel intrigue to know more, it also allows the information to be captured and collated for access by future generations.

Change happens when people are engaged, passionate and excited. To get to that space, an inner connection to who we really are, and what has really mattered throughout the years, is key. Facilitate and tap into this connection with “the oldies”, and in turn they will be highly motivated and automatically involved — then step back and watch miracles as they happen.

*Debbie Nicol, the managing director of Dubai-based business en motion, is a consultant working with strategic change, leadership and organisational development. Email her at [debbie.nicol@businessenmotion.com](mailto:debbie.nicol@businessenmotion.com) for thoughts about your corporate change initiative.*

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