leadership. Examples include 67-year-old Harry Stonecipher, who recently succeeded Phil Condit as Boeing's CEO; John Reed, named interim chairman and CEO of the New York Stock Exchange; Allan Gilmour, vice chairman of Ford, who rejoined the company after retirement; and Joseph Lelyveld, who stepped in temporarily at the *New York Times* last year.

But then, maybe 65 was never what we thought. Lee Iacocca once told *Wired*, "I've always been against automated chronological dates to farm people out. The union would always say, 'Make room for the new blood; there aren't enough jobs to go around.' Well, that's a hell of a policy to have. I had people at Chrysler who were 40 but acted 80, and I had 80-year-olds who could do everything a 40-year-old can. You have to take a different view of age now. People are living longer. Age just gives experience. Besides, it takes you until about 50 to know what the hell is going on in the world."

What Iacocca understood was that people don't suddenly lose the talent and experience gained over a lifetime at the flip of a switch. It's not good business to push people out the door just because your policies say it's time. Smart companies will find ways to persuade mature workers to delay retirement or even eschew it entirely as long as they remain productive and healthy.

Discussion Questions

1. Older workers are one group who might help companies keep their workforces at full strength; what other groups might contribute to this effort?
2. What attitudes and policies inhibit the effectiveness of companies' strategies for hiring older workers?
3. Why might older workers be particularly interested in flexible work schedules and assignments?
4. What advantages do firms obtain by creating flexible work schedules and assignments for older workers?
5. One day you will be considered an "older" worker. What strategies can you implement in the workplace to avoid being stereotyped or discriminated against.

Case Study: Asleep at the Wheel: Ford Motor Company's Exclusion of the Older Worker

Ford Motor Company—founded by Henry Ford in 1903 with 11 associates, $28,000, and the slogan "I will build a motorcar for the great multitude"—was sued for age discrimination in 2001 and again in 2003.

Jacques Nasser, who became chief executive officer of the multibillion-dollar automaker in January 1999, quickly began an aggressive crusade to infuse diversity into the tradition-based Ford. Two years later, Nasser was ousted and replaced by Henry Ford's great-grandson, Chairman William Clay Ford, Jr. One of the primary reasons for Nasser's fall from power was his well-intentioned diversity initiative that ironically became a method of exclusion of and discrimination against older workers.

In a 2000 address to top executives, Nasser complained: "I do not like the sea of white faces in the audience and Ford Motor Co. must ensure that in the future the company reflects the broad spectrum of Ford's customers."[1] These words reflected his seemingly aggressive position on

Source: This case was prepared by Dr. Kathryn A. Cañas and Dr. Harris Sondak, The University of Utah.

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workplace diversity—Ford must diversify to maintain its competitive edge. Taking the conventional Ford Company on an unconventional journey, Nasser pushed his employees full speed ahead: "While we honor our traditions, we are not bound by them. The energy and ambition of the Ford team to create new ways is almost limitless. As long as they keep their eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel."[2]

Despite his efforts to increase diversity at Ford, Nasser found his company facing two class-action age-discrimination lawsuits in addition to a number of individual discrimination lawsuits. The story of how a revolutionary crusade for diversity led to serious charges of age discrimination begins with an understanding of the dynamic yet polarizing leadership style of former Ford CEO Jacques Nasser.

Jacques Nasser

Nasser's impressive career with Ford began in 1968 when, at age 20, he accepted a job as a financial analyst with Ford of Australia. Accepting international assignments—that some may have found unappealing—enabled Nasser to move up in the company as he found himself working in Thailand, Venezuela, Argentina, and the Philippines. Nasser had a reputation for being a "rising star" and "ahead of his time," for example, when he encouraged "suppliers to cooperate and piece parts together into modules before shipping them to Ford assembly plants."[3] Just as Nasser was known for his creative problem-solving skills, he was also known for his toughness. While working in Argentina in 1985, Nasser was held hostage for three days when a Ford plant was seized during a political uprising; he eventually collapsed from exhaustion.[4]

In 1990, Nasser returned to his homeland to help salvage the deteriorating Ford of Australia by cutting the 15,000-person workforce in half and improving productivity by 40 percent. In 1996 he became Ford's head of automotive operations in Detroit; he helped Ford reduce costs by $3 billion, in part by eliminating weak vehicles like the Aspire, Aerostar, and Thunderbird.[5] In 1999, when he became Ford's CEO, he was viewed as a unique leader known for his involvement with employees and direct, immediate feedback on issues ranging from employee presentation skills to car design.

Although Nasser was described by many as pioneering and charming, he was also perceived, by others, as polarizing. And while his fearless leadership style won him prestigious honors such as the 1999 Automobile Industries Man of the Year, this same quality led to the creation of his nickname, "Jac the Knife," which reflected his reputation as a "bare-knuckle" cost cutter, unafraid to eliminate superfluous workers.[6] According to David E. Cole, director of the University of Michigan's Office for the Study of Automotive Transportation, "He is a very polarizing figure . . . People have strong emotions about him one way or the other. He's a compelling guy."[7]

Nasser never tried to hide his unique style or his four-tier plan for Ford's transformation: to improve Ford's customer focus, to develop leaders at every level, to embrace the digital consumer age, and to diversify his workforce. While Ford executives and employees embraced Nasser's goals, they slowly began to question his methods for achieving them. The main concern ultimately became his aggressive campaign—what was often described as a revolution—to diversify Ford's workforce.

Nasser's Diversity Crusade

Passion was, perhaps, Nasser's most captivating quality. It was this passion—stemming from his personal experience: being born in Lebanon and then emigrating with his parents to