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WANT TO STOP THE GREAT RESIGNATION? SHOW YOUR EMPLOYEES SOME APPRECIATION!

April 7, 2022 by [Val Grubb](#) / [Leave a Comment](#)

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“The Great Resignation isn’t primarily about the logistics of work. It’s about its meaning.”
—Jessica Stillman

“War for talent.”

“Skills gap.”

“The Great Resignation.”



Unless you’ve been living under a rock for the past few years, I’m sure you’re already very familiar with these phrases. They’ve served as the steady refrain in many conversations about the challenges companies face in their hiring and retention these days.

There’s been a lot of talk about strategies for keeping employees around. Making their work

more financially lucrative by giving them more money and better benefits is one obvious solution. But it’s only one part of a bigger picture: although there are some people who are motivated purely by money, most people seek something more from their jobs. And unless you succeed in meeting those “something more” expectations, you’ll have a hard time with retention.

Over the last year, voluntary separations have jumped as more and more people leave jobs that don’t offer what they want. If you take a look at the [Job Openings and Labor Turnover statistics \(JOLTS\) reports](#) that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics puts out, you’ll see that the “quits” rate reached 47.8 million in 2021 and still remains pretty high.

It doesn’t look like this situation is going to improve any time soon. Managers and companies that don’t take action now will struggle to find and keep great employees.

Why You Should Care

Here’s the most obvious reason why this matters: your bottom line. Without appropriate and adequate staffing, a company can’t do what it does (e.g., provide a service, make a product) well enough to meet its market goals. A company’s operating costs also take a hit

when turnover is high, with the **researchers at Gallup** estimating that “the cost of replacing an individual employee can range from one-half to two times the employee’s annual salary—and that’s a conservative estimate.”

That’s when *one* employee leaves. Now imagine what happens when several employees or an entire team leaves. *Ouch.*

Beyond its impact to the bottom line, staffing instability is also detrimental to company culture. Frequent departures and new arrivals disrupt workflow and make it difficult for your employees to build camaraderie and achieve top productivity. High turnover can torpedo your efforts to build and sustain a top-notch workplace:



Losing your best people means losing your reliable winners, your constant innovators, and your most effective problem solvers. Internally, it breaks down team morale. Externally, it can mean lost customer relationships. Depending on the quality of the exit, it can threaten your brand or, at worst, lead to litigation. (Gallup)

And of course high turnover affects *you*. What does it say about your leadership and management skills when your employees don’t stick around? You should strive to be the kind of leader who can build enough trust and loyalty among your employees to make them want to stay.

Why People Leave

“Understanding your employee’s perspective can go a long way toward increasing productivity and happiness.

—Kathryn Minshe

People leave their jobs for many reasons. But whether those reasons are rooted in complaints about compensation or other more non-quantifiable concerns, ultimately they all boil down to one main cause:

Employees leave because they don’t feel valued and appreciated.

During the Great Resignation, these departures have accelerated not only because employees are considering the reasons that have been there all along, but also because the uncertainty, loss, and fear that they experienced during the pandemic have caused them to reevaluate what they prioritize most in their lives and what they want from their work.

Beyond inadequate compensation (whether real or perceived), there are plenty of other ways in which employees can feel unappreciated enough to want to leave their jobs.

Poor relationships with their managers. We’ve all heard the old saying “People leave managers, not jobs.” That’s not a throwaway line: it’s the truth. Fortunately, being a “bad” manager isn’t a genetic condition but is actually something that can be fixed! If you want your managers to be great at their jobs, give them the training and support they need. Help them learn how to give employees constructive feedback and how to deal with problems effectively. And help them learn the importance of showing their appreciation for their employees.

And if your managers can’t learn how to be an outstanding people leader, replace them.

Not feeling part of a supportive and welcoming community. A strong company culture based on trust, respect, and individual empowerment can make employees feel valued (and also build their loyalty). Improve your company’s diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI) initiatives so



that you're doing a better job of welcoming talented people of all backgrounds into your organization and respecting and supporting *all* of the employees who are already there. Managers who show empathy and support for their teams ultimately have more engaged teams.

Don't worry, being empathic doesn't mean you can't fire someone. It just means you're going to do your best to listen, care and help them be successful in their role. (Read my blog on Empathy to learn how to hold someone accountable while also being empathic.)

Not feeling that their concerns are being taken seriously. Ask for and listen to employee feedback. Ask them "what do you want?" and address their concerns even if it means being more transparent on any issues that can't be addressed due to financial conditions at the company. The more the employees understand the inner workings of the organization (and how to read a P&L and Balance Sheet), the more they understand decisions that affect them. One final note of caution...DON'T ask for your employees input if you're not going to do anything about it.

Nothing screams "good bye" from an employee's perspective like asking for my input then ignoring it.

Not feeling that they are valued as individuals. No one wants to feel like a cog in a wheel. No matter how productive (or efficient or profitable or whatever) your company is, remember that it is made up of people who each make their own contributions to the business.

Celebrating company-wide wins is great, but don't forget to zoom in past the department and team levels to offer personalized and individual recognition to the people who make those successes happen.

Help employees see the big picture and their role in the organization's success (and then show them appreciation for it).

Not having a sense of purpose at the company. When people are spending 40+ hours a week doing something, they often want that something to carry meaning for them beyond earning a salary to pay the bills. Yes, employees do have specific roles and tasks to fulfill, but helping them find meaning in their work shows them that you appreciate them beyond their strictly defined contributions to the company's profits.



See my earlier post, "Tapping into Purpose," for ideas on how to do this.

Not offering flexibility. I know this is a hot button for many managers (we've all known someone who has been blowing off while "working from home" these past two years), but understand if you make a blanket declaration that employees must go back into the office, you're going to have a very unhappy workforce. Now, if you're Google or Amazon, you can get away with this. But if you're a "normal" company, not taking into consideration the flexibility that employees want and need in their daily lives, you're going to have a very challenging time keeping employees.

Check out my blog entitled “Accountability in the Age of Remote Work” on exactly how to set expectations and then hold your employees accountable for achieving them.

Don't Underestimate the Effects of the Pandemic

“*When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.*”

—Ernest Hemingway



The last two years have been hard—*really* hard. The stress of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has driven a lot of people to their breaking points:

- Many employees have gotten sick during this time and dealing with the stress of get caught up on missed or delayed deadlines is immense.
- Many employees who avoid COVID-19 have been asked to support people who got sick (both in the office and at home).
- Lots of people had to deal with disrupted or completely obliterated work–life balance, because increased workloads and blurred boundaries between personal and professional spaces when working from home (homeschooling anyone? What is childcare again?).
- Social isolation, which was a reality for most people for an extended period of time, is mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausting.

If you add those factors into the big pot of “reasons why people are unhappy about their jobs” and give it a good stir, it’s no wonder the Great Resignation is happening right now. The general stress of living during a pandemic has, for many people, pushed them right into “burnout” territory in their jobs—and primed them to walk.

If you want to keep those employees around, in addition to showing the types of general appreciation I described above, you need to show them that you understand how stressful the last two years have been:

- Check in with your employees frequently, regularly, and meaningfully. And by “check in” I don’t mean asking about the progress toward a certain deadline or whether they’ve submitted their status reports. I mean asked them sincerely, “How are you doing?”—and listening to what they have to say.
- Offer flexible work arrangements to people who aren’t ready to return to the office yet (and are still able to meet their role requirements remotely). Most companies don’t need to rush their employees back into the office, especially if they are still getting everything done with remote or hybrid work arrangements.
- Do what you can to communicate to your employees that they are integral parts of your community and not easily replaceable, throwaway components.



Show your employees that you appreciate and value them even more in light of what they have accomplished during the pandemic. For the most part, this costs nothing financially but can actually benefit the company by dissuading employees from leaving. (And you might find that **tapping into your inner well of empathy** can help you navigate your own pandemic-related stress and anxiety, too.)

Final Thoughts on Employee Appreciation

“*You never know when a moment and a few sincere words can have an impact on a life.*”

—Zig Ziglar

Few people wouldn't be happy to receive one of the “classic” displays of appreciation. These can include as experiential awards (concert tickets, restaurant coupons, spa vouchers, museum or amusement park passes, etc.); public praise via award ceremonies, company-wide announcements, or posts on the organization's website or intranet; gift cards; or company swag. (For more ideas for recognition awards, see my earlier blog post “[99 Rewards That Won't Break the Bank.](#)”)

But don't stop there: resolve to be the kind of leader who doesn't just dole out awards but also shows appreciation by listening to employees and addressing their concerns.

Ultimately, the most effective way to counter the Great Resignation is to make your employees' current situation one that they don't want to leave.

In addition to offering competitive compensation, cultivate a culture in which appreciation is never assumed but freely and frequently given to demonstrate to your employees that you understand their worth and value their contributions.

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