

Gone for now, or gone for good?

What's popularly known as the **Great Resignation** is not inevitable in your organisation. But it will inexorably gain ground if you don't act knowingly and decisively. *Gone for now, or gone for good?*, the catchy title of today's post, is the headline of a March 2022 research **paper** by Aaron De Smet and colleagues. In this post, I set out how as a leader you can act to prevent disruption and distress.

The pandemic and its social, health and economic consequences have triggered the waves of people leaving their traditional employment. But the causes are multi-faceted and partly self-inflicted by leaders. In the past, voluntary attrition was the result of competition for talent where a worker left their company for greener pastures in another. Now it's different – and your first step is to truly understand.

Why they are leaving

People are leaving for one or more of these reasons:



They can. Leaving a job used to cause anxiety, even fear, about the next one. No more. The cost of switching is reduced and it's no longer a stigma having a gap in your resume. People perceive they now have many more choices because the unconventional is now fully accepted.

They are upset. Aaron De Smet's survey reminds us of the harsh truth that many leaders are seen not to care and hold unrealistic expectations about their workers' performance and productivity. When someone leaves and is not replaced, those remaining feel they have to

shoulder the extra burden without recognition or additional resources.

They are exhausted. Burnout and chronic stress, family care demands, rumination about the state of the world and reflection on the meaning of work are things I see amongst my clients. In short, mental health has become a #1 concern and driver of workers making trade-offs between income and security on the one hand and better life-work balance on the other.

How to bring them back – and keep them

Too many employers have responded by doing more of the same, using short-term solutions to address their talent shortages. It's time to take a different approach:

Pay to be in the game: Review your remuneration and benefits. Being market-competitive is necessary, but not sufficient. Because pay transparency is at an all-time high so simply paying more to attract talent while those who have remained in similar roles are left behind is fraught with danger – when they find out they will angrily leave. Target your benefits to help improve work-life balance: well-being days, subsidised home cleaning services, or onsite childcare and children's meals in the canteen. Consult to find the right balance between pay and benefits.

Win by making your workplace sticky. Listen to employees – hold 'stay' discussion groups, not 'exit' interviews to understand what will motivate people to stick to you. Consider letting candidates try a role for a couple of weeks, rather than putting them on probation. Or let them rotate through several areas and then choose one. allow extra days off after a prolonged or intense period of work. Pay for short course professional development or special mental health assistance.

Expand your talent pool. In spite of your best endeavours, you will still need to replace people. Today's talent drought will last for many years. Now's the time to think in non-traditional ways. Find hidden pools of talent, for example people who have dropped out, but might be willing to return to the right offer. Be prepared to use job-sharing, off-shoring, part-timing or contracting – while none of these are new, they should be mainstreamed.

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