

The background is a vibrant yellow with a halftone dot pattern. At the top, a large black silhouette of a hand holds two orange ropes that cross. A black silhouette of a person is climbing one of these ropes. A large red pair of scissors is positioned in the middle, with its handles near the person climbing. At the bottom, there are silhouettes of city buildings with grid windows.

# HAS THE 'GREAT RESIGNATION' ACTUALLY HAPPENED IN AUSTRALIA?

BY ROXANNE CALDER

Termed by US psychologist Anthony Klotz, the 'Great Resignation' has been picked up and carried, lantern-like throughout the media. It's most convenient in allaying reason and cause. A fait accompli; out of our hands, almost like the pandemic itself.



## Topics of inclusion, equality and mental health came into focus, introducing a different perspective on happiness, fulfilment and our calling

The essence of the 'Great Resignation' is that, following pandemic epiphanies, there is a significant upswing of people quitting their jobs – whether they are exiting the workforce altogether, taking early retirement or sabbaticals, or just simply seeking a change.

Have these resignations been occurring? Sure. But to the magnitude it's beefed up to be?

### **FACT OR FICTION?**

In the November 2021 quarter, job vacancies were 396,100, an increase of 18.5% from the previous quarter and 74.2% higher than in February 2020, just prior to the pandemic. The main contributing factors for these vacancies are replacements/resignations, increased business workloads and business expansion.

So, are resignations up or down?

The answer is 'both'.

In February 2020, 78.6% of the job vacancies were due to resignations versus 77.4% in November 2021. Whilst a decrease in percentage terms, it is still an additional 127,845 resignations compared to February 2020. The abundance of job vacancies provides ample choice, extensive bargaining power and a sense of security for job seekers.

However, to put this in context, this figure represents 0.009% of our working population versus America's 4.3 million workers – or nearly 3% of their total workforce. I'm not sure we can join America in the 'Great Resignation' stakes.

### **WHAT DOES THIS REALLY MEAN?**

Regardless, the impact of resignation is great and significant. This is especially so for Australia at present. The loss of intellectual property, the downtime involved in recruiting and training etc. has always been a great cost. It's now highly aggravated.

But what if you can't fill these positions? This is the real problem we face in Australia; our haunting reality. Filling any job vacancy is an extreme challenge.

Think the job market's Everest.

### **THE CONUNDRUM**

The issue of the resignations – whether they be 'Great' like America or simply at an increased level as in Australia's case – is the constricted and severe talent shortage. Overlay this against our current unemployment figure of 4.2% (near full employment) and the bar just etched up a notch.

It is a supply and demand equation. The reduced number of skilled workers with an abundance of vacancies provides ample choice and allows people to quit jobs with ease. It's a lure from the COVID-19 cave.

Resignations and replacements are a part of any employment landscape and, in good times, regarded as healthy for business and the individual. But, when the position cannot be easily filled and in a timely manner, the cost of the empty seat and the toll on businesses is significant.

### IS THE PANDEMIC TO BLAME?

The shift in attitude to our jobs, work and life is evident. However, it's been a long time coming and built over the years. We cannot give COVID-19 full credit for the changes afoot.

Instead, COVID-19 gave us the green light to be more self-serving – and Omicron was the icing on the cake. Just as we emerged from Delta and the severe restrictions, Omicron entered as if to say, 'It's not over yet'.

The past decade increased our focus on emotional intelligence and raising one's self-, social and political awareness. Topics of inclusion, equality and mental health came into focus, introducing a different perspective on happiness, fulfilment and our calling. It enabled the recognition and understanding of sources of discontent and dissatisfaction.

The result: people are seeking different types of work or careers, having choices over who to work for, where, and even when, they work.

### A LONG TIME COMING

COVID-19 reduced the barriers and gave us permission to view the world through a different prism. With time to think and reflect, many have recognised the fragility of life and the limitations to guaranteed safety. The skills shortage, giving power to employees and bringing forth more resignations is not unique to the era of COVID-19. It was in place well before 2020.

Even the sea change coined as the 'pandemic exodus' was trending well



before 2020. A report shows that between 2011 and 2016, young people were increasingly staying in regional areas or leaving capital cities. Now various reports show people wanting to return to the cities. According to UBS, in the US, migration from cities 'has largely ceased' and urban occupancy is rebounding.

All of this says how quickly we shift, change and adjust.

Perhaps the 'Great Resignation' is simply the shift in the collective mind and change in the attitude we have towards work and life.

We don't change or quit what we genuinely love. The antidote to the 'Great Resignation' is developing our ability to love what we do, which is a choice – just the same as quitting.



#### ROXANNE CALDER

Roxanne Calder, author of *Employable – 7 Attributes to Assuring Your Working Future*, is the founder and managing director of EST10 – one of Sydney's most successful administration recruitment agencies. Roxanne is passionate about uncovering people's potential and watching their careers soar. For more information on how Roxanne can assist you in your career, visit [www.est10.com.au](http://www.est10.com.au).

#### FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

**4 charts show how fast everyone is flocking back to big cities** (Ben Winck, 2021, Business Insider Australia)  
<https://www.businessinsider.com.au/urban-exodus-people-leaving-cities-charts-exurbs-real-estate-moving-2021-8?r=US&IR=T>

**A&M professor who predicted 'Great Resignation' explains potential factors of why theory came true** (Alex Miller, 2022, The Eagle)  
[https://theeagle.com/news/a\\_m/a-m-professor-who-predicted-great-resignation-explains-potential-factors-of-why-theory-came-true/article\\_e99bb37c-6f29-11ec-9a2e-030d1c45b621.html](https://theeagle.com/news/a_m/a-m-professor-who-predicted-great-resignation-explains-potential-factors-of-why-theory-came-true/article_e99bb37c-6f29-11ec-9a2e-030d1c45b621.html)

**I made a sea change during the pandemic, but I miss the diversity of the city** (Elfy Scott, 2021, The Guardian)  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/17/i-made-a-sea-change-during-the-pandemic-but-i-miss-the-diversity-of-the-city>

**Job Vacancies, Australia** (2021, Australian Bureau of Statistics)  
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/job-vacancies-australia/latest-release#key-statistics>

**Labour Force, Australia** (2022, Australian Bureau of Statistics)  
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release>