

Care to keep them happy

How to ensure your business doesn't experience another great resignation.



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The great resignation was a monumental disruption. An employee revolving door and the consequent, relentless search for talent left many of your hiring managers stressed and feeling hopeless, 'How to deliver the impossible?' The skills shortage was the catalyst for the great resignation, and every business felt the impact.

But that's last year's story. Surely unemployment levels will adjust, making 2023 different, right? I'm afraid not. Even with the global unemployment rate forecast to reach 5.8 per cent, and Australia's forecast between 3.7 per cent and 4.5 per cent, it is not enough of an equaliser. For perspective, in 2018, pre-pandemic times and before the acute skills squeeze, the global unemployment rate was 5.4 per cent,

and Australia's was 5.3 per cent. The shift is not enough and paints a grim picture for talent retention.

So, how do you avoid another great resignation? Use your organisation's sticking power. Here's how.

Know your workforce drivers

In any other time of worldwide redundancies and economic instability, job security would be our workforce's number one concern. But not when your employees are also combatting the stratospheric costs of living. The global inflation rate peaked at 8.8 per cent in 2022, and the International Monetary Fund forecasts 6.6 per cent for 2023. Compared with pre-pandemic levels at 3.51 per cent in 2019,

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it is a marked difference. Any decision to resign in today’s environment is less likely a whimsical 2022 move and more likely a necessity.

Whilst paying sky-high salaries is never an advised strategy, paying fairly and equally is recommended. What if you have already paid generously in 2022 and don’t have a budget for further increases? Look to provide benefits that alleviate financial pressure for your employees. Whilst not a substitute for competitive salaries, there are some worthwhile considerations. Working from home saves money on commuting costs, even work attire and food. Additionally, consider superannuation contributions, lunches and meals at work, healthcare and performance bonuses.

Get close to your team

Know your employees well, and I mean really well. Relationships are the lynchpin to securing talent, and you hold the key as a leader. We look after our working capital with clockwork and precision care. We even have insurance for some items. Services and checks are never missed because we know it is crucial for ongoing operating efficiency.

Our human capital is no different. Your employees need the same, if not more, care and consideration, and on time every time. Those casual catch-ups or coffees promised, which are sometimes missed, make a big difference. The performance review that has been rescheduled one too many times also matters. These are times to connect, further establish trust and pick up on subtle signs and signals, circumnavigating a resignation well before it touches the subconscious.

Consider conducting ‘stay interviews’. Why wait to discover the reasons your employees are leaving? Unless you are incredibly adept at influencing, the chances of turning the decision around are low. And, if you do, welcome to the resignation waiting room, anticipating the next change of heart. Instead, discover the reasons why people enjoy their job. The exercise of provoking these thoughts reinforces positive feelings and attitudes. They’re contagious and have a power unto themselves when said aloud.

Workplace flex

Flexibility in every way is important. The opportunity to work from home or in a hybrid arrangement is just the beginning. Leaving early, starting later, reduced hours, four-day weeks etc., to fit in life’s priorities are the minimum expectations from today’s workforce, and not just for families. The collective, across all generations and demographics, expects the freedom and flexibility to pursue what is important to them, whether that be education, sport, leisure, travel or other interests.

It doesn’t stop there. The notion of workplace flex has evolved into so much more. It relates to how we approach

and tackle work and job-related issues. It requires an enterprising mindset, with a keen view to exploring possibilities, opening opportunities and new pathways, and even taking risks in testing prospective solutions. Saying ‘no’ or ‘that’s not how we do it’ is an archaic outlook in a fresh, rapidly developing and fluid world.

Opportunities to advance

Your employees want opportunities to develop and grow. In 2021, a Pew research report stated that 63 per cent of employee resignations were due to a lack of opportunities to advance. Well, in 2023, so much has changed. Organisations need their employees to take up the challenge. Due to the severity of the skills shortage, new hires and internal promotions have required a different perspective on talent.

Compromise has been key, with the need to upskill and reskill our employees. It takes time to come up to speed in ‘normal’ hiring times, let alone when the skills gap and deficit are significant. When taking such a leap and stepping up, your employees need a supportive work environment where they feel psychologically safe, secure and allowed to make mistakes. Nothing will push your employees out the door quicker than the feeling of failure.

Being in an uncomfortable zone is stressful enough. Make it a ‘good stress’ of achievement and progress, not deflation and demotivation. To support such a hiring strategy, instil nurturing, teaching, and patience as an environmental and cultural norm. Learning environments attract and keep people. This is so important that we see progressive companies appointing chief learning officers. Even better, companies that excel at internal mobility retain employees for an average of 5.4 years.

You

Managers and leaders are the glue. They always have been. The virtues of organisational leadership have been touted ad nauseam. I am just not sure we have listened until now. The workplace has changed since the pandemic, and our employees play a different role. The dynamic has shifted, and so, too, has the expectation on our leaders. The beliefs and values about how career and work fit with our lives are different and becoming more elusive to define. Our employees now expect work to promote and support the vision of their life’s meaning and, thus, see leaders as partners in that quest.

Leaders are involved and participate in individual goals more than ever before. To be a successful promoter of your evolving employee needs requires the necessary leadership skills to care, nurture, mentor and inspire – and yes, you must be genuine. The full involvement and co-operation of those in authority and leadership is imperative. ■