

The Great Resignation Report

A report into the new phenomenon that is changing the face of the modern workplace.

 **Leafyard**

State of Play:

There has been a significant shift in the workplace that's being felt by employees, employers and even at a governmental level. The battle over flexible working, exacerbated by the pandemic, is coming to a head with thousands of us leaving our jobs, seeking out something different or something more.

According to a report by McKinsey and Company, 36% of employees who have quit in the last six months did so without a new job offer in hand. This isn't about security, an increase in pay or necessarily getting a dream job - this is purely about getting out of a situation that's no longer tolerable for the individual.

A lot of commentators are quick to claim that burnout is the leading cause of what is being dubbed "The Great Resignation" with 85% of respondents to a Harvard Business Review study reporting a decline in their mental wellbeing during the past couple of years. It's not a surprise that our collective mental wellbeing has taken a hit given the upheaval, uncertainty and stop-start nature of our lives recently. However, the problem seems to run deeper into company culture, societal pressures surrounding the importance of work, and an emphasis on what is really important following such a monumental shift in our lives.

The fundamental problem seems to spring from a basic lack of communication between employees and employers who moot different motivations behind the mass exodus. In an article by The Guardian, more than 25% of UK businesses said that lack of staff was affecting their ability to operate, leaving the potential for huge economic pressures.



State of Play:

CEO and founder of Breakroom, Anna Maybank, has said, "The Great Resignation shouldn't be seen as workers having just had enough, what we are seeing is workers becoming more empowered and then prioritising what is actually important when it comes to their working life.

"We also know from the Breakroom community that there has been a growing disconnect between what employers think staff want, and what actually motivates them. We know that after pay, that working environment and shift flexibility and planning are the most important things to front line staff. employers can no longer risk undercutting the market and not offering basic benefits such as sick pay, paid breaks, and flexibility and notice of shifts.

"Whilst this may seem like bad news for employers we also know that studies have shown that those workers who are happier in their roles are also more productive and actually save businesses money, meaning embracing the "Great Resignation" and everyone making the move to "good jobs" will be a win-win for all involved."

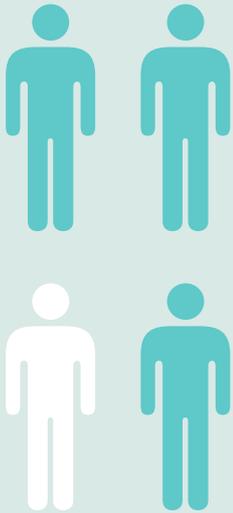
So, what steps can businesses and organisations take to actually retain their staff and ensure that their workplace remains productive and content?

"There has been a growing disconnect between what employers think staff want, and what actually motivates them"



Statistics at a Glance

25%



Of UK businesses said that lack of staff was affecting their ability to operate.

[The Guardian, 2021]

26%

would accept a pay cut to work remotely.

1 in 5

UK workers feel that they don't belong in their workplace.



60%

of UK workers would turn down a new role if they believe that the company's values don't align with their own.

Why do employers think people are leaving?

In order to try and solve this issue we need to pinpoint why employees are actually leaving. The thing is, the reasons that employers are giving are being contradicted by the wider statistics and even the employees themselves.

Reasons cited by employers and businesses as to why the Great Resignation is happening include:

- Burnout
- Wanting to work from home
- Wanting to move out of the city
- Not wanting to commute anymore

Although these reasons may contribute to the overall decision, this is by no means the entire story.

Burnout, typically used by businesses interchangeably with stress, is actually so much more than that, and as such, has to be dealt with in a much more comprehensive way. In many instances, if someone is feeling stressed at work, the suggestion is to take a couple of days to rest up and return to work rejuvenated, however, this is just one piece of a much bigger puzzle.

Jennifer Moss, author of *The Burnout Epidemic*, cites research pointing to other factors that play a role in burnout, including a lack of autonomy, recognition and connection, doing work that doesn't reflect one's values and feeling as if the workplace is unfair. Rest can address exhaustion, but not the accompanying cynicism or powerlessness. When you return to work those factors are still there.



Why do employers think people are leaving?

When it comes to location flexibility, this is increasingly becoming important for employees. Especially for those who worked from home throughout the pandemic, realising that they can productively do their role from home therefore saving time and money commuting, buying lunches, paying for childcare, was a game changer.

Josh who worked in PR and recently left his role for a remote equivalent after being recalled to the office said “We could do ad-hoc home based days when needed, but they had to be asked for. The trigger came when I spoke to my boss about scheduling these days, as I have family.”

My boss's response was 'If we did that for everyone, then everyone would be at home on Friday so they could be in the pub sooner'. I nodded, but all I could think was, 'If you can do this free thing to improve our staff's conditions, why aren't you?'"

I started looking for new positions and quickly realised I could earn London wages while living in rural Wales by working fully remote. I do that now, and am very happy doing so. I spend more time with my family, spend much less on fuel and earn more money."

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Why do employers think people are leaving?

Similarly it's a consideration for those wanting to get more usable time out of their day. Lucy, the founder of Bare Kind, a bamboo sock company that donates 10% of profits to a charity that saves endangered animals, left her corporate job to start her own business.

"From a practical point of view, I had been commuting from London to Birmingham 3 days a week and it was taking a huge toll on my mental health. When we went into lockdown it was actually a massive relief for my brain and body. And I knew I couldn't go back to commuting – the fear of having to do that again was also a driving factor."

"The corporate world says that they're flexible' but the culture just isn't there yet. I'd leave the office before 4pm to get a decent train home so I could work out and eat at a normal time (I was up at 5am). I'd be working all the way home on the train, yet I'd be judged for leaving early even though I had a 2.5 hour journey... it just wasn't a nice culture to be a part of. Whereas I believe you can be productive in your own ways and on your own time, it doesn't have to be within the hours society dictates."

So, clearly flexibility in the workplace is a key contributor to this mass resignation phenomenon, but it's still only one part of it. Businesses and leaders are overstating its importance to the point that it's appearing as if the only reason people are leaving is because they don't want to be in the office 9-5 anymore. It's not all about location and commuter lengths.



Why are employees actually leaving?

Realistically, there are plenty of reasons why people are leaving their jobs - same as it always has been. Whether that's due to the individual not feeling like their contribution matters, that their own values don't align with that of the business, that they desperately need a change, or that they no longer feel challenged - there are dozens of reasons why people might leave.

Of course, flexibility, stress and changes in perspective and circumstances as a result of the pandemic have sped up these processes exponentially, resulting in the seeming huge amount of resignations happening at the moment. Now that a lot of people in the UK seem to be feeling as if the world is back to normal, the economical uncertainty that was preventing them from taking the workplace leap no longer looms as large. Where there previously would've been a steady drip of resignation, role changes and general workplace trend shifts and conversations, two years worth of that has all come to a head within a matter of months.

Jodie Keerie, was one of those people where everything just seemed to build up to a point of no return and now works in a flexible role as a self-employed tutor at Nurture Learning UK, where she feels like she's doing something that will make a difference.

"After experiencing a big smack in the face of burnout (worked all the way through Covid with little to no staff) I decided enough was enough. The pointless meetings, the impossible to achieve KPIs, the sexism of working in a man's world, unpaid overtime, lack of support and the stress of it all that I was carrying around with me and projecting on to my loved ones. I had no joy left and I couldn't see a way out.



Why are employees actually leaving?

“It took me a while to pluck up the courage to do it - how was I going to afford it? How long would it take me to find another job? How would they cope without me? Am I letting my team down? What else could I do, this is all I know?”

This kind of guilt following the decision to leave is common among many. Despite what many will say about the lack of loyalty in the modern workforce, the feeling that you're letting down your past employer and that's reason enough to stick out a bad situation for longer is a common thread. However, during the pandemic, many have realised that life is too short to stick around and hope for the best.

Elliot Walker, Founder and CEO of The Massage Company has recognised this, “The last 18 months have really driven a desire for change in employees across the UK. People want better job satisfaction, they want a fresh start, and they want to feel a sense of independence and control over their career.”

The control aspect is critical here. During the pandemic, a lot of us felt completely out of control and at the whims of others, causing a rise in anxiety, depression and stress - particularly over the future. We weren't able to choose where we were working from, we couldn't control when the restrictions would change and this left many of us looking to take back control of whatever aspect of our lives we could - namely our careers.

Clearly, the disparity between the employer's thoughts behind the Great Resignation and the employee's given reasons for leaving is emblematic of a deeper cultural and communicative issue that needs to be addressed. So, how can we do that in a practical, proactive way?

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What can employers practically do?

According to a study by Randstad, 1 in 5 UK workers feel that they don't belong in their workplace. For those workers under the age of 35, this increases to one in four. When we're looking to the future of work and what leaders should be doing moving forward, our employees need to feel valued and aligned with their workplace.

Josh, the PR Professional that left his role during the pandemic commented that "I get the impression there are a lot of employers that tie how well their business is doing to how many people they employ, or can order around and make themselves feel important, and that does not create a good environment."

Increasingly the statistics are showing that this feeling of belonging, of feeling valued and listened to, particularly around flexibility is becoming as influential when it comes to retention figures, as the traditional salary conversations. So much so that in a recent study by NearForm showed that 26% would accept a paycut to work remotely. Offering pay rises or incentives might help but if an employee doesn't feel like their work matters or that they're making a difference, it's only a matter of time before they look elsewhere.

In the same Randstad study, 60% of UK workers would turn down a new role if they believe that the company's values don't align with their own. It's long been posited that Millennials and Gen Z alike are looking for something more from their work than just remuneration. Incorrectly, many businesses translated this into pool tables, free coffee and a work night out a month. All these perks do is blur the already strained lines between work and play. If working remotely has taught us anything, it's that a church and state approach is necessary not only for productivity but for our own personal sanity and mental health.



What can employers practically do?

Common threads include having a work/life balance, feeling valued, feeling like you belong and are doing something worthwhile with your work all stem back to our mental self-worth. This is what we need to be focusing on and it's not entirely down to the individual to do the work. Businesses and organisations need to address the mental health and mental fitness elephant in the room if they want to retain their staff and keep productivity and creativity high.

Businesses who want to get ahead and solve the problem are increasingly turning to practical, action-based solutions such as **Leafyard**. Leafyard is a web application that combines science and study to motivate people to take control of their own mental health and educates and motivates them to take small steps every day. By offering this kind of solution, businesses and organisations can show their employees that they do actually care about not only their wellbeing, but their future happiness as well.

Improving mental fitness in the workplace has been shown to increase resilience, improve communication, listening skills and individual self-worth - all aspects that have been lacking during the past few years, therefore culminating in this mass career exodus.



Summary

As Molly Johnson-Jones, co-founder and CEO of flexible careers specialists, Flexa, has said, “The pandemic has been a trigger for staff to reassess their jobs and what they want from them. For many of those who’ve handed in their notice over the last year, the conclusion has been: more flexibility and better work-life balance. If companies want their staff to stay, they must focus on nurturing workforces who are happy, engaged, and able to do their jobs well.”

We spend a third of our day at work. It therefore takes up the majority of our waking hours and people are finally recognising that this time needs to be spent in a place that nurtures and supports our wellbeing.

Businesses need to get on board now or risk not having enough staff to operate. Whether it’s offering mental health solutions to your employees, listening to what they need and finding a way to make it work, or sharing the overarching vision and strategy for the future with your teams, we know that when people feel like they’re part of something, they feel more invested in the associated outcomes.

To retain your staff and keep your business thriving, you need to do the following three things:

- Communicate your vision for the future and help them see exactly where they belong in that vision.
- Offer them the meaningful support they need to make a difference.
- Actively listen to their concerns and work with them rather than assuming their needs and concerns.

