Talking points

The Great Resignation: Why are millions quitting their jobs?



More than 10 million job openings aren't being filled.

A 30-year-old North Carolina woman quit three restaurant jobs in the past year, fed up with low pay, demeaning bosses, and rude customers. "I'm constantly having the fact that I'm replaceable just being shoved in my face," she said. A San Francisco program manager, 28, quit his job making $100,000 annually at a tech startup, disillusioned by a career that dominated his life with endless workdays. Tiffany Chen quit her unfulfilling job in New York's fashion industry, and although working as a freelance photographer creates more financial stress, she's happier. "I've started to see [work] less as my identity," says Chen, 30. These Americans are part of a mass exodus from the workforce that economists are calling "the Great Resignation," said **Michael Blackmon** in ***BuzzFeedNews.com***. A record 4.3 million people left their jobs in August, after 4 million quit in each of the previous two months. The mass exodus has left more than 10 million openings, especially in the restaurant, retail, and hotel sectors. They're not being filled, with many Americans feeling "overworked and over work."

"It must kinda suck to be a boss right now," said **Derek Thompson** in ***TheAtlantic.com***, but it's actually wonderful that so many people are saying, "To hell with this." The Great Resignation is, in part, a movement of workers standing up for their own well-being and dignity. Many front-line workers were forced during the pandemic to risk exposure to Covid-19, work long hours of overtime to compensate for staff shortages, and deal with customers "cabin-fevered and filled with rage." Servers, cooks, and clerks have decided that "suffering nonstop rudeness" isn't worth it. Some of those who quit were also rebelling against poverty wages, said **Laura Entis** in ***Vox.com***, and their stand is paying off: "Costco, McDonald's, Amazon, Chipotle, Bank of America, and CVS have announced plans to raise the starting or average pay for hourly workers," and the average restaurant and supermarket workers' wage recently surpassed $15 an hour. For the first time in a long time, workers have some leverage over employers.

"There's a catch, though," said **Brent Orrell** in ***TheDispatch.com***. Most job openings are in the same sectors that people are leaving. So, unless "footloose workers suddenly acquire new skills to make them viable in other industries," they're likely to "find themselves back in the same or similar job at a slightly higher rate of pay." There are other reasons for not celebrating the Great Resignation. Most of the people quitting are women, many of them pushed out of the workforce after day-care centers closed and schools went remote, leaving families "without care options for their kids." The resulting staffing shortages are felt everywhere. "Can't get a drink at the bar, the sheets changed on your hotel bed, or a burger delivered in less than 20 minutes?" All caused by a lack of staff. "Turns out we have a lot more 'essential workers' than we imagined."

"Big Labor" is making the situation worse, said ***The Wall Street Journal*** in an editorial. Unions are seizing on the national worker shortage as a chance to flex their muscles. Frito-Lay employees won steep raises and more control over shifts after going on strike, and more than 1,400 Kellogg employees joined picket lines this month. Last week 10,000 employees at John Deere walked off the job, having rejected a deal that would have "lifted the typical production worker's annual wages to $72,000 from $60,000," on top of a one-time bonus and better retirement benefits. When businesses have to hike pay dramatically, they then raise prices to customers and become less competitive, "which ultimately hurts the workers who will lose their jobs in the future."

This could be a pivot point in our economy, said **Paul Waldman** in ***WashingtonPost.com***. "From the earliest moments of the pandemic, Republicans worried that workers might start getting dangerous ideas about their self-worth." When Democrats included enhanced unemployment benefits in Covid relief bills, panicked Republicans said it "would make Americans lazy and unwilling to work." GOP-controlled states cut unemployment benefits this summer, promising "an explosion of job growth." It didn't happen. That's because the Great Resignation is about something much bigger than money, said **Paul Krugman** in ***The New York Times***. "By upending many Americans' lives," the pandemic caused them to reconsider whether it was worth staying in "lousy jobs." Wages have stagnated, hours are long and unpredictable, vacation is limited, and management treats staff without any loyalty or respect. "American workers are insisting on a better deal, and it's in the nation's interest that they get it."