



ADVANCED  
WORKPLACE  
ASSOCIATES

## THE 10 STEP PLAN FOR EMPLOYERS TO TACKLE THE GREAT RESIGNATION

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Around the world for many people the pandemic has triggered a re-evaluation of lifestyles and life values. White collar workers are beginning to ask themselves why they were commuting 10 hours a week (for some that represents more than 15-20% of their weekly waking hours) while slogging it out in roles they didn't find satisfying, sometimes within offices with toxic cultures. Many arrived home mentally exhausted with little time or energy to devote to partners, friends, families or themselves. As a result, many people are choosing new careers, roles or organisations that afford them more satisfaction, support and control over their time, locations and lives.

Data from the US shows that for most of this year over 4 million people a month have been quitting their jobs and the trend is starting to be seen across the Atlantic. A recent survey states nearly a quarter of all UK workers are planning to change jobs in the next few months with job vacancies soaring above other countries.

Clearly, the 'Great Resignation', as it has been dubbed, represents a risk to organisations, who may see the knowledge and skill of key workers they have invested heavily in over the years, disappearing out of their organisations virtual front door to other organisations or sectors, leaving the inevitable hole, which, in extremis, could be mission critical. Headhunters are having a field day with many workers being constantly approached with offers of 'greener grass' on the organisational 'other side'.

So, as an employer, what should you do?

### 1. Recognise that the game has changed

First there needs to be a C-suite recognition that the game has changed. Companies no longer have the whip hand in the employer/employee relationship. Caustic cultures, poor management and untrusting mindless inflexibility will no longer be tolerated by professional workers who have new options that are not limited by locational proximity.

### 2. Upgrade management skills

Then there needs to be a rapid upgrading of management skills with an evolution to a more transformational style of leadership in which leaders shift from a 'control and tell' leadership style to a 'coach and support' style. Friendly, supportive corporate cultures and behaviours need to be developed with new leaders comfortable in facilitating team sessions, listening and negotiating new agreements from the standpoint of trust and fairness as opposed to mistrust and corporate diktat. Let's face it, many workers have earned the right to work physically unsupervised due to their performances throughout the pandemic. Performance management systems need to shift to monitor and reward positive leadership behaviours and skills.

### 3. Stop rewarding technical excellence with management role promotions

For too long, technical excellence has been rewarded by a career transition into a 'management' role, often without an assessment of the individual's management skills nor any training/coaching for leadership. This can't continue. Those poorer managers can either be coached to be as good as the best leaders in the organisation or moved to a role where their technical skills can be utilised without having to 'manage' people. In the final analysis poor managers need to be 'managed out' of the organisation with care, sympathy and support to join organisations with cultures more suited to their own.

### 4. Start new conversations where the organisation accommodates the individual

The up-skilled leadership community needs to start having deeper conversations with their people about their life situations, aspirations, likes and dislikes, types of work they want to do, and how they would like to develop along with work flexibility needs (time, place, pattern, etc.). The aim must be to work with each individual and team to create new arrangements that, wherever possible, meet the individual's work-life needs and aspirations while meeting team and operational requirements. Of course, all this needs to be done within a cross-organisational framework that clearly provides a set of guiding principles and operating guidelines that enable fairness and consistency. Leaders should be empowered to make new agreements with their teams on how they are all going to work in the future within these guidelines.



## 5. Use common sense to deliver a Business First mindset

Clearly the effectiveness of business operations needs to take a high priority in any discussion about new ways of working. However, if organisations are going to retain the loyalty of their people and the enthusiasm for the work they do, they will have to come some way toward the employee in striking new deals that work for everyone. Organisations that do this will also become magnets for the disenfranchised workers from other organisations unable or unwilling to change to meet the wants and needs of individual workers.

## 6. Assuage the C-suite's fear of anarchy

Many senior C-suite leaders are genuinely concerned that moving to hybrid working will create 'work anarchy' where everyone does whatever they fancy, with a vision of lost control. They are also concerned about a dilution of corporate culture, which they strongly believe is enhanced by everyone showing up in the office every day. So instead of upskilling their managers, re-engineering policies and processes, they'd prefer to take the 'easy' route and issue blanket edicts like 'everyone must be in the office three days a week' or 'everyone has to be in the office 50% of the time' or 'if you don't come back to the office, we'll dock your pay'. The inevitable response from workers will be 'we've been working perfectly well at home for the last 18 months so, tell me again why you want me to come to the office three days week doing things that I could perfectly well do with a laptop and a decent broadband connection from my home or a local co-working centre?'

## 7. Promote magnetic friendships

Another important magnetic force for the retention of employees is friendship. When people get on well together, socialising and building friendships (all other things being equal) they will be reluctant to move to another organisation where they'll have start building their friendships and community all over again. Social cohesion allows people to be themselves, help each other out and share knowledge. It also creates the conditions within which tough problems can be tackled and difficult conversations can be had. In the past social cohesion was looked on as a nice to have by leaders and as long as people 'did their job' (i.e. delivered on their daily tasks) they were thought to be doing OK. If people didn't connect with other colleagues or build friendships the odd comment might be made, but no action would be taken. In the new world that kind of behaviour needs to be tackled because knowledge workers need to connect to share their knowledge, help each other out and create the conditions under which new knowledge is 'sparked'.

The Advanced Workplace Institute study ['Managing The Virtual Workforce'](#), conducted with the Centre for Evidence Based Management, analysed 750 pieces of academic research into remote working to give a picture of the critical importance of social cohesion within the workforce and how managers can foster this in a virtual or hybrid working environment.

It's clear that leaders in organisations need to develop conscious and deliberate strategies for generating and maintaining social cohesion on their communities. These strategies should address relationships within the team, the community, team to team and up and down the organisation. Here are the sorts of things that can be considered:

Make it clear that a key responsibility of a leader is to create a socially connected community and make this a performance requirement;

- Internal events that designed to cover topics of interest to employees but are also educational. These can be designed with breaks out sessions with enough time for people to get to 'break the relationship ice';

- Random Coffees, where people are invited to connect using a software tool that sends people invitations and tracks whether they met;
- Spotlight events where new employees are interviewed in public and their arrival is celebrated;
- Social events organised by leaders for teams and communities;
- Competitions and challenges that pit cross function teams against each other;
- The formation of special interest groups where people come together to discuss, learn and do stuff. These can cover sport, books, films, music and so on.



## 8. Work hard to demonstrate fairness

Fairness is something we all hold dear in our lives and unfairness in treatment or benefits is something that will start to eat away at workers' loyalty, enabling the headhunters who has been 'chipping away' to convince the employee in 'at least having a conversation' with a prospective employer. While not everything can be fair in organisations, it's important that leaders attempt to work to a consistent set of principles and explain the reason for decisions in an open and honest way.

Fairness is often also judged in relation to employee benefits and compensation. Increasingly people swap notes about their pay, and unexplained differences between colleagues doing the same job can lead to frustration. Similarly, when the headhunter comes calling, he/she will show the vulnerable employee pay rates in other organisations for (apparently) the same role. Employers need to pay attention to these comparisons like never before.

## 9. Support development schemes and culture

Particularly in the minds of younger workers, career development support through coaching, mentoring and the sponsorship of qualifications weighs highly in their sentiment towards their organisation. While some organisations are good at these aspects, many are less so.

There are four key connections:

- When people join an organisation they need to be connected to a 'buddy' - someone that is of a similar demographic, that they can 'ask the stupid question' and 'hang out' with;

- They should be provided with a mentor whose role it is to keep in touch, act as a confidential sounding board and to champion the career of the individual they are mentoring;
- Each person should have access to a development coach, responsible for clarifying the individual's career aspirations, understanding current skills, knowledge and competences and working up a coaching plan to upskill the individual at a rate comfortable for the individual. Like sports coaching, the intention should be to develop the individual's capabilities to make them more value to the organisation and build skills that are valuable to the individual;
- Last but not least is the relationship with the managers, the person who, at this time is setting objectives and is responsible for delivering the teams outcomes.

In many organisations the only real relationship is with the line managers, who often are more pre-occupied by meeting their personal objectives than looking after the scarce resource, that is the employee. Traditionally managers tend to try and 'hang on' to good people in their teams, prioritizing their operational performance over the development of the individual.

## 10. New contracts – a two-way street

Those reading this paper who have run or built a business will be thinking that the relationship between the organisation and the individual is becoming something of a one-way street, with the employer bending over backwards to give employees everything they could ever want. While this often is the direction of travel, it does seem a little unfair. You spend two years giving junior staff development support only to find that they announce with regret that they are leaving in a few short weeks' time to join a competitor who has wooed them through a headhunter catalyst.

How do you combat this? Nowadays part of the deal struck between professional services firms and their employees is that if the employee leaves within a certain period, they must pay for the cost of the training they received. Taking this further, maybe we'll see new contracts akin to those that sports teams have with their stars. In exchange for a signing-on fee and an agreed progression structure, the worker agrees to remain in the organisation's employ for a defined period during which if they leave, the receiving employer has to pay a transfer fee.

For example, in La Liga, Spain's elite football league, contracts for players regularly have a buy-out clause which, if met by another side, means the player is free to agree a deal with the other club. For example, Arsenal paid the €50 million buy-out clause to sign Ghanaian midfielder Thomas Partey from Atletico Madrid. Employment contracts could have similar buy-out clauses.

## Summary

The game has changed and so must organisations if they are going to hang on to their best people and attract the talent they need for the future. Change is never easy but, without it, the success of many organisations in a rapidly evolving digital world will be limited. The pandemic has triggered hybrid working and new attitudes. It isn't just about where you work; it's about how you manage, your culture and recognition that the employee has more power in the relationship with the organisation.







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