

Building Higher Trust 88 Trust and The Great Resignation

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD

Lack of trust is strongly correlated to The Great Resignation that started in 2021 and continues today. Many leaders took a wrong turn in 2020, and it is costing them dearly years later. I suspect most leaders could not articulate the wrong turn, so what chance do they have of reversing it? They lowered trust by increasing the “command and control” logic in response to many people working from home.



The old paradigm

Prior to the pandemic, the working world experience was the same for most people. You got up, got dressed and fed, went to work, and arrived on time. All those actions were part of the daily routine for most people. It was expected behavior, so we all complied with various degrees of discipline. If we went too far off the beam, then there were negative consequences.

Abrupt change for most people

That pattern changed in March of 2020. Most of us now stayed home and did our work in a different setting. We were forced to work with distractions that were not there before. Other family members' needs were distractions. Even pets could be the cause for loss of concentration. We interfaced with each other using computers. The most common phrase in meetings became “You’re on mute.”

A wrong turn

In this environment, many leaders decided that additional controls were required to maintain reasonable productivity. The classic “command and control” mechanisms that were in place before the pandemic were not adequate. Here is where the wrong turn happened. To feel comfortable, many managers resorted to tracking methods to ensure they were getting the full attention of their employees.

Lower trust

The tracking methods took many forms, from tracking computer keystrokes to frequent phone calls. All of the verification steps sent the same signal. People felt lower trust on

the part of management. Perhaps they tolerated the abuse, but it left deep scars in the relationship with their leaders. Those scars are what triggered the Great Resignation.

An extreme example was the use of pecking bird toys. They would hit some keys every 30 seconds or so while the employee was in the bathroom. There were other extreme ploys that allowed employees to appear like they were working.

People started playing games

The lack of trust is what led people to adopt a “fool the clueless boss” mindset. That feeling was the genesis of the Great Resignation. When people stopped and thought about all the Mickey Mouse rules, they became offended. They were willing to work in return for a living wage, but not at the expense of their dignity. Numerous workers decided the tradeoff was not worth it.

Forced Vaccinations

Some companies overstepped by forcing employees to get injected with experimental products. Many people quit rather than take a risk with unapproved substances. Some of the people who did comply had serious side effects and quit for that reason. The result was more strain on the labor shortage issue which had a negative impact on morale.

Bucking the trend

Some leaders did not fall into the trap. They expressed trust for their employees and showed empathy for them with the things they said and did. Most importantly, it was how things were presented to employees that conveyed real care and empathy. Those leaders actually enhanced trust in the time of great turmoil.

Conclusion

Leaders who tried to increase control during the turbulent COVID situation actually ended up losing more control. Those who were more inclined to trust their employees and showed it ended up as the winners.

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