
RYP Quarterly

WHY STAFF LEAVE OR STAY – A LEADER’S DILEMMA

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The story behind of why staff leave is always more than just money. COVID forced many people to reflect on where they are at in their life, what drives and fulfills them personally, and what they are seeking from their career. This introspection is an important dynamic to understand for both Business Leaders and Staff

The attracting and keeping of good staff is a challenge at the best of times. COVID has made this even more challenging as people take time to reflect on the World around them, observe how their Employer has acted and responded to the challenges of COVID, and as a response formulate their own future and personal needs (based on what is important to them)

“**The Great Resignation**” is filling Business Journals around the World with all sorts of advice on how Employers should tackle this phenomenon. For Business Leaders whether staff stay or go will be a test of the prevailing team culture, the compelling future direction story and plans to get there, and how this journey engages, and links the hearts and minds of staff. It is important any staff member can readily connect and link their own aspirations, motivations, and life plans with the organisations stated future. **The responsibility for staying or leaving has two sides of the story. It requires a two-way commitment.**

In this article we outline why staff leave, what staff are looking for, a checklist for leaders to maximise staff retention, and finally warning signs to look for. Nothing is fail-safe, it is about maximising the likelihood of good staff staying.

***Many of a Leaders greatest achievement will be the success of the people they employ, and some of their greatest disappointments will be in some of the people they employ.
Welcome to the Leaders Dilemma.***

WHAT STAFF ARE LOOKING FOR

There is no set formula for what staff are looking for, but research over the years continually affirm that the following features are what staff look for in their job and career. These are not in any priority order

1. **Quality Working Relationships** – The Team Culture of how the team works together is key. Having a good team chemistry where people are respected and there is a sense of togetherness,

helps foster a work culture where all team members feel they are valued and important members of a team. This applies to full time, part-time, casual, and contracted workers. They are all members of a team. Culture always precedes performance.

2. **The Team Feels They are Part of Something Unique** – Having a clear and authentic Purpose, Vision, and Business Direction that has been shared with the staff is key. Important staff to feel this is compelling and unique, and importantly there is no ambiguity on how each staff member can personally contribute or make difference to this quest.
3. **Trusted and Respected Leadership** – Staff generally do not leave an organisation; they usually leave bad management! This includes immediate Managers and Supervisors. If a leader cannot provide a sense of empowerment, optimism, team inclusivity, and personal engagement it is highly likely staff will not stay for long. It also highlights a toxic or incompetent Manager. Once a leader has lost the trust or respect of their team, they rarely get it back.
4. **Meaningful Work** - This is more than just setting KPI's. Staff need to feel they are contributing to the bigger team performance and helping add value to the team. This requires two key elements. The Work being performed is measured, monitored, and reported on. Secondly and importantly progress is recognised and acknowledged regularly.
5. **Pay and Conditions** – Must be on par with industry standards. There must be a sense of fairness, equity, and meaningful incentives for achievements. Importantly if staff do believe they all share in the successes and challenges of the organisation (equitably) there is usually a satisfaction with the current status quo. When things are going well fiscally there should be a collective feeling of job security and shared rewards. Equally when things are tight there must be a sense of a collective approach to belt tightening and sharing of pain. There are times (during skill shortages and high labour demands) where some sectors will offer way over the odds in terms of market salary. Some people will pursue this. Others are motivated by other elements such as work flexibility, career advancement, responsibility, or a sense of team belonging. If this is deemed important, then there is a possible likelihood they will stay.
6. **Autonomy & Empowerment** – No one performs better when micromanaged. Important people feel there is a sense of trust and permissions for them to make autonomous decisions. They must feel a sense of Confidence and Commitment from their Leaders to become competent and proficient in their ability to make decisions and exercise good judgement in their daily work. Important for front line staff and leaders to have a sense of ownership in the decisions they make. Also important for Staff feel they have a say in local decisions that affect them.
7. **Staff are encouraged to Grow & Learn** – This is more than training. Important staff feel they can learn and grow in line with the direction of the organisation. Having self-managed three-year learning journeys is a good approach to helping future managers lead their learning. This includes an exploration of the things they need to be, know, experience, and learn in order to build their confidence and competence, in order to maximise both their career advancement, but also their value to the organisation.
8. **Having Fun** – A sense of togetherness, achievement, enjoyment, team celebration, and social interactions help build a sense of fun and a “winning mindset.” Important for team rituals, celebrations, and get togethers to be made a priority – not just periodic bursts of social

activities. Having a positive, progressive, and inclusive team will fuel a sense of fun, familiarity, and workplace fulfilment.

A CHECKLIST: RETENTION MOTIVATORS V HYGIENE FACTORS

Whilst no one thing is fail safe in retaining staff, there are a list of important housekeeping factors that are important to build a cohesive environment that supports staff retention.

These can be broken into “Motivators” and “Hygiene” Factors. Both are important.

Typically, Motivators will need to be tailored to each staff member, while Hygiene Factors generally will apply to all staff

HYGIENE FACTORS <i>Apply to All Staff</i>	MOTIVATORS <i>Need to be Tailored to Staff</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT is bright, warm accommodating and professional ➤ CLEAR ROLE DESCRIPTIONS & Accountabilities to ensure no ambiguity in what performance is expected, or who is doing what ➤ MEASURES OF SUCCESS are known, shared, and monitored in order to track performance and inform decision making. ➤ RELIABLE & CONSISTENT PAY which is paid in full on time – free of errors, omissions, or inaccuracies. Nothing stresses staff out more than having their pay consistently wrong or delayed ➤ DISCIPLINED TEAM PULSE that includes the rituals of how each week, month and quarter are started, reviewed, and lived. A Team Cadence happens both as a whole of organisation and in small local sub teams. Ad-hoc approaches kill morale. ➤ FAIRNESS & EQUITY across all teams, so there is a collective feeling of being one team – free of silos or preferences ➤ LITTLE BUREACRACY where decision making, approvals, and policy setting are streamlined, non-complex, and not burdened by unnecessary red tape or management “sign off” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT both personally and collectively, where progress is being observed and acknowledged ➤ RECOGNITION FOR ACHIEVEMENT where individuals and small teams are acknowledged and recognised for their achievements in a meaningful manner ➤ A SENSE OF BELONGING where individuals feel they are respected, and valued team members and their work is deemed important to the team’s performance ➤ AUTONOMY OF DECISION MAKING is encouraged by Leaders free of compliance audits, “please explain emails,” or unclear guidelines. This is important for often recurring or frequent decisions ➤ LEARNING JOURNEYS that are clear, encouraged, stepped, and self-managed ➤ CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK LOOPS that support how a person learns and makes decisions. Annual appraisals should be replaced by annual objective setting and continuous feedback mechanisms. These should be regular – timely – constructive and purposeful ➤ A CONNECTION WITH LEADERS who instil a sense of confidence, empathy, discipline, and trust

This checklist is not new. But acts as a good conversation catalyst to check in with staff and hear their perceptions of what is going well and could be improved from their perspective. Recurring themes can be acted on, whilst one offs provide an insight on where each staff member is sitting in terms of their current and future needs.

Proactively start the staff retention process and check in with them, before they tell you they are leaving

THREE NOT NEGOTIABLES TO HAVE IN PLACE TO MAXIMISE EMPLOYEE RETENTION

1. **PURPOSE – VISION – DIRECTION** *(Something Staff Can Personally Sign on to)*

As the World emerges out of the COVID fog, having a clear and compelling direction and business quest will help provide staff with hope for the future, a sense of excitement and commitment to how they can help contribute to and be part of the organisation's success, and importantly, cascade down to staff so they can personify and apply the Direction personally, and reflect on what this may mean for their future.

2. **SENSE OF BELONGING – RESPECTED AND VALUED MEMBER OF THE TEAM** *(Something Staff personally feel and connect with)*

Humans are social animals. We all have feelings and emotions. We all need a sense of purpose and commitment when we get up in the morning. A sense of team belonging, and being valued is what fuels individual motivation, resilience, enthusiasm, and commitment. Without this, a person will do a job for as long as it suits them – devoid of any passion or commitment.

3. **HOW STAFF ARE MANAGED** *(The Working Relationship with their Leaders)*

There is no room for toxic leadership, discrimination, bullying, inappropriate behaviour, management incompetence, or poor role modelling of desired behaviours. Any of these will drive an "attitude of indifference" with staff to their direct managers. Toxic Managers or those with poor attitudes will drive good staff out of any business.

There is no excuse for tolerating toxic Line Managers

WARNING SIGNS TO LOOK FOR

There are usually tell-tale warning signs a staff member might be contemplating or about to leave. These can typically include a combination of the following:

- ✓ They have flagged previously they are disgruntled or dissatisfied with the status quo
- ✓ They have recently had a life changing event causing them to re-evaluate what is important to them
- ✓ They have an attitude of indifference to the workplace, as evidenced by their constant finding of fault, negative narrative of their colleagues or job
- ✓ They are a roller coaster of emotions, where they become upset at minor things, prone to outbursts of anger, easily upset and teary when constructive feedback is provided, or unusually sensitive
- ✓ Their engagement and interest in the team wanes. They are silent in meetings and stop contributing voluntarily to team needs or business issues

- ✓ They seem distracted, uncaring, flat, or sometimes even aloof
- ✓ Punctuality drops off, or absenteeism (the need for days off) rises, along with the need to depart early or right on knock off time
- ✓ They have conflict with co-workers, along with a reluctance to collaborate or work with colleagues
- ✓ The quality or volume of work falls off, or becomes sloppy
- ✓ Volunteerism for extra tasks or projects stops
- ✓ There is a marked increase in their presence on social media – especially Linked In
- ✓ Are slow or unresponsive to emails and other communication loops
- ✓ There is a distinct drop in their energy, enthusiasm, and passion for their job
- ✓ They have flagged that they are contemplating a “sea or tree change”

If you as a leader see or sense any of these, it is worth checking in with the staff member(s) concerned and have a private 1:1 conversation with them.

CHECK IN MEANINGFULLY

Do not wait for a staff member to tell you they are leaving. Usually, it is too late to do anything to make them stay. Get proactive. COVID has affected everyone, and many people will be having thoughts around their careers and personal lives. Having a meaningful check in with a staff member is more than a just “A how are you conversation?” A meaningful check-in conversation needs to be safe, private, conducted 1:1, in the right environment.

SOME MEANINGFUL CHECK-IN TIPS

1. Provide forewarning and notice on what the meeting will be about and why you are wanting to do this
2. Make available to all staff, not just those who may be at risk of leaving
3. Conduct the Meeting 1:1 in a safe and conducive environment (free of distractions)
4. Ensure the staff member understands you are genuinely invested in their needs, development goals, and personal circumstances
5. Ask open ended questions to ascertain their tone of voice, language, body language and eye contact
6. Start by enquiring about:
 - a. How things are at home
 - b. What reflections and experiences the Family may have had since COVID started
 - c. What Personal Learnings they have had over the past 18 months
 - d. Their observations and feedback of you as a Leader over the past 18 months
7. Explore their Three-Year Aspirations and Needs in both their personal and professional lives. Demonstrate you are interested in them. Anything more than 3 years out becomes too vague
8. Record their narrative around key issues that include...
 - a. The Things they want to BE
 - b. Things they aspire to DO
 - c. Skills and Attributes they need to LEARN
 - d. Experiences they need to UNDERTAKE
 - e. Family Commitments they need to KEEP
 - f. Roles and Tasks they need to Observe, Understand and EXPERIENCE
 - g. Anything they need to MASTER
 - h. What fuels their WELLBEING (Mental & Physical)

- i. What will build their CONFIDENCE
 - j. Skills to Acquire and Permissions to enforce to be EMPOWERED
 - k. Behaviours which need to be CHANGED
9. Provide the gift of feedback in response to their narrative around your observations.
 10. Finally agree a three-point action plan to jointly commit to and review in 100 days. Any more than 3 becomes difficult to recall and action effectively within the agreed time

If a staff member announces they are leaving for more money – resist the temptation to get into a salary horse trade. Ask what they would require for them to stay (over and above just matching a promised salary). This may help reveal other reasons for leaving, which may be salvageable. If they are leaving for a perceived large pay increase that you cannot match, and that is what they value, then it is likely they cannot be retained.

FINALLY

Not all staff can be kept! This is a fact of life. Indeed, some staff turnover year on year is desirable, as you continually look to refresh, renew, and reboot your team. However, losing big chunks of staff suddenly and rapidly can have major consequences to team balance and morale. With COVID impacting on everyone in some way shape or form, forcing many to rethink what is important to them, where they want to live, and the type of career they wish to pursue, it is important to proactively check in with your staff.

Do not wait for staff to announce they are leaving. Get on the front foot. Proactively check-in with your staff, listen to their narrative, align needs and expectations, and agree next step actions.

Once a staff member has an attitude of indifference – they will start to find fault with their status quo and look for alternatives. This is also a two-way dynamic

FACTA NON VERBA – DEEDS NOT WORDS

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