

# The Economist

## Rebounding from Resignations

by Julie Winkle Giulioni

Unwanted attrition is an unfortunate yet inevitable reality in today's business environment. Current studies highlight the threat facing leaders domestically and internationally.

- According to Gallup's State of the American Workplace, 51% of workers are looking to leave their current jobs.
- 34% of employees plan to leave their current roles within the next 12 months according to [Mercer's Global Talent Trends Study 2017](#).
- SHRM's 2017 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement research paints an even dimmer picture with 40% of employees considering employment outside of their current organizations within the next year.
- And when Dale Carnegie Training polled 3,300 employees in 14 countries, 29% of employees worldwide expressed an intent to look for a new job in the coming year and 16% admitted to currently looking.

There's little that's more frustrating to leaders than seeing top performers take their talent down the highway to a competitor (or even down the hallway to another department). As a result, employee engagement efforts abound.

Many organizations work diligently to cultivate environments that enhance job satisfaction, help people find meaning in their work, recognize and reward employees for their contributions, and support personal and career development.

While all of these strategies are good for business and can contribute significantly to improved retention, leaders cannot depend upon these efforts alone. They must take a realistic and clear-eyed view of the future and confront the inconvenient truth that they will – at some point – lose key talent. Because wishful retention thinking is not a valid business strategy, effective leaders take action every single day to protect themselves, their teams, and their organizations from the threat of attrition.

Anticipating and planning for the dangers of unwanted turnover involves looking at, planning, and delegating work differently. Four pre-emptive strategies can dramatically mitigate the risk and disruption when a top performer resigns.

- Distribute – It's seductive to find those key high-impact employees and load them up with a body of work that allows them to become the go-to person in a particular area.

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Yet, what happens when Mr. or Ms. Go-To is gone? Distribute the risk – and expand the brain-power – through strategic delegation. Carve up and disperse work and assignments in a way that won't put all of your eggs in one basket.

- Double-up – Most organizations are operating leaner than ever before and must deploy resources with surgical efficiency. But, creating the reserves required to weather unwanted turnover means thinking in terms of strategic redundancies. Build back-ups and actively encourage employees to share tasks and projects. This offers protection from resignations, and it also allows the organization to absorb the effects of unexpected absences. It also encourages a generous approach to vacation leaves (and the productivity boosts associated with rest and rejuvenation) knowing that important work will continue to get done.
- Develop – Career development is a well-known and well-documented retention strategy. But, it's also an attrition-recovery strategy. When you help each employee grow to his or her potential, you have a full pipeline of internal resources ready to continue essential work. You also develop a positive brand in the talent marketplace, allowing you to more easily attract top talent and back-fill key roles.

- Delight – Finally, when an employee leaves, it has human as well as business implications. Those who remain respond in a variety of ways. As a result, it's essential to find ways to engage employees, to build resilience, and to cultivate the ability to agilely adjust to inevitable workforce changes.

Turnover is an inescapable fact of organizational life. And the fresh ideas, energy and perspective that follow a resignation – even of a key player – can actually enrich an organization. Still, leaders owe it to themselves and the business to take proactive steps each day to minimize the risks and to be ready to respond positively to those dreaded but inevitable words, 'I quit!'

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*Julie Winkle Giulioni is a champion for workplace growth and development and helps leaders optimize talent and potential within their organizations. Named one of Inc. Magazine's top 100 leadership speakers, she's the co-author of the international bestseller, *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go* and author of the Nautilus and Axiom business book award-winner, *Promotions Are So Yesterday*. Julie is a regular contributor to numerous business publications.*