Burnout, stress and The Great Resignation – What motivates employees to stay or to go?

In the pre-pandemic world, employees may have accepted unrelenting stress and the possibility of burnout as simply another facet of their work lives. But now, employers (and their employees) are realizing that a work landscape that relies on overworked and burned-out employees isn’t sustainable in the long run. They have come to realize that pushing ourselves to our emotional and physical limits prohibits us from being our best selves — in all areas of life.

Workplace burnout isn’t a new phenomenon, but employees in the United States experienced it in unprecedented rates in recent years. The 2021 Work and Well-Being Survey¹ taken by the American Psychological Association showed that:

- 36% of respondents reported cognitive weariness
- 32% reported emotional exhaustion
- 44% reported physical fatigue

Many workers reached a final breaking point after months and months of high workloads and other pressures, causing them to rethink their work and life goals. As the pandemic unfolded, many people had an opportunity to sit back and ask themselves: “Am I living a life that enhances my well-being?”

The Great Resignation

Some people quit their jobs early in the pandemic. Others delayed their decision to quit until things stabilized a bit. This resulted in a backlog and a flood of new resignations during the past year or two. Employers are now scrambling to find enough workers. Resignation rates were higher among those working in fields that had extreme increases in demands due to the pandemic. This led to increased workloads and eventual burnout. This was especially true for employees in health care, teaching and those classified as “essential” workers.

A majority of workers who quit their jobs cited reasons such as:

- low pay and poor working conditions
- no opportunities for advancement
- feeling disrespected
- working too many hours
- childcare issues


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Help employees feel valued

What motivates workers and keeps them from leaving their current position? The simple answer is: working for an organization that helps them maintain a healthy lifestyle with “work-life balance.”

Employers might want to rethink — not only the compensation they offer — but how they treat their employees. Leaders are encouraged to provide emotional support and create an environment that is respectful and empowering — where employees feel valued, trusted and included.

Offering flexible work arrangements and/or flex scheduling can help attract and retain employees of all ages, genders and levels. Some employers are offering hybrid arrangements (example: working three days per week at home and two days onsite) to encourage productivity, while meeting their employees’ work-life balance needs.

Though difficult, the last several years have provided valuable lessons to companies, managers, and employees about the importance of self-care and the need to seek new ways of working and living that can better serve us all.

The age and gender gap of the Great Resignation

Younger adults and those with lower incomes were more likely to quite a job as a result of the pandemic. This was especially true for women who left the workforce in large numbers. Some estimates show that women dropped out of the workforce at twice the rate of their male counterparts. The primary reason? Women may have lacked the support necessary to balance increased family life obligations, in addition to their job responsibilities.

Advanced economies in other countries attract and retain female (and male) workers by offering:
- extended (paid) maternity and paternity leave
- affordable child care and educational opportunities for young children
- greater support for family leaves and eldercare

Remember, Advocate Aurora EAP offers employees free counseling services, as well as childcare and eldercare referrals, to help families deal with any family-related issues they may be struggling with.

For more information, please call Advocate Aurora EAP at 800-236-3231