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Attracting and Keeping People in the COVID-19 Era

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The “great resignation” – the catch phrase being used to describe the increasing number of people quitting their jobs – is big news today and is accelerating due to COVID.

According to [MarketWatch](#), more than 39 million people have left their jobs in 2021 – some 4.2 million people quit their jobs in October alone – and that number likely includes people who have quit more than one position.

But one of the myths of the great resignation is this: many of those people are not leaving the workforce entirely but are *simply switching jobs* – and the biggest reason given is that those jobs pay more and are more rewarding.

Of course, there are other reasons for quitting – COVID-related stress is one, early retirement is another. And many folks just don’t want to return to the office and the hassles of commuting, preferring instead to work from home.

Consider the newest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics: there are double the number of job openings now as there are the number of new hires – meaning there are more choices available to people looking for new opportunities.

In short, the expectations of workers are changing, and choices abound of new opportunities available to them. The employee attraction and retention impact for organizations is huge – and the pressure on hiring is unprecedented.

What Matters Most to Employees

To help answer the questions of what organizations can do to keep their people and what other organizations offer that motivates them to leave, I was pleased to join Professor Gerald Cupchik of the University of Toronto in a global study of freelancers – independent professionals typically hired for short-term assignments.

The research was supported by 78 freelance websites around the world, and materials for questions were supplied by Dr. Jon Younger of the Agile Talent Collaborative. The purpose of this study was to understand the motivations and preferences of those workers and what they are looking for from employers.

Though the freelancing community was the focus, we discovered that our research has broader implications for competent, experienced, and skilled employees in any profession or line of work. Some take-aways:

- Financial considerations are not always the most important criterion for choosing a job. Others include assignments that are interesting and challenging and assignments that allow significant flexibility and work-life balance. These factors appear to be consistent regardless of one's age, gender, industry, location, and field of expertise.
- Freelancers – and by extension full-time employees with valuable skills and experience – can be sorted into “types” based on what they put as their highest priority: interesting and challenging work, greater freedom to work how and when they want, or income and a well-defined career path.
- Employers that seek people with the right qualifications need to ask what they have to offer them as their “value proposition”: do they provide a path to career progression and higher income, assignments that utilize one's skills more fully and provide learning opportunities, or do they allow people to choose how, where, and when they will work to meet performance expectations of their employers?

Get a Closer Look

These findings and many others are presented in [a new website](#) featuring a presentation in which Professor Cupchik and I discuss the motivations of freelancers and what they look for in their relationships with clients. In a forthcoming conversation, to be released early in 2022, we will discuss how to help freelancers and employers make the best hiring and career choice decisions to achieve greater productivity, satisfaction, and success.

Through our research, we hope that we will learn more about what keeps key talent in place, what lures them to greener pastures, and what we can say in general about how employees and employers can come together better through shared interests and greater mutual satisfaction.

Stay tuned for more.

About the author

George Klemp is a consultant with the Leadership Advisory Services division of [Spencer Stuart](#), a global executive search and leadership consulting firm. He specializes in talent assessment, development, and helping organizations identify and develop people for leadership roles at all levels. He was also a founding partner at [Cambria Consulting](#), where he worked with over 100 companies in the Fortune 500 as well as colleges, universities, and federal agencies to develop talent strategies to improve organizational performance. He can be contacted at gklemp@spencerstuart.com.

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