

From the author of *The Presidential Principles*
and *The Audacity of Leadership*

JUST LEAD

44 Actions to Break Down Barriers,
Boost Your Retention, and Build
a World-Class Culture

ANTON J. GUNN

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PEOPLE ARE FED UP

An estimated 38 million people have quit their jobs since 2020, with 24 million leaving in a short six-month span between April and September 2021.¹ Some are seeking employment elsewhere, while others have dropped out of the workforce altogether.

For example, a 2021 study from The Cengage Group found that 12% of people who had resigned from their jobs were not currently exploring new career opportunities.

This phenomenon of people quitting their jobs in droves during and after the COVID-19 pandemic is referred to as “The Great Resignation.” And it’s having lasting impacts on businesses in nearly every industry.

While some of the hardest-hit industries employ

¹ (CG-great-resigners-research-report-FINAL.pdf 2022)

blue-collar workers (e.g., retail, food service), The Great Resignation also affects white-collar workers, causing many to leave what seems like good, stable employment opportunities.

So, naturally, the question is, why are people so willing to leave their jobs, especially when they don't have another one lined up?

Several answers to this question depend on the employee and the company they are leaving. Yet they all boil down to one common theme – employees are fed up with being overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated by companies who insist on putting profits over people.

Why So Many People Are Quitting Right Now

Mostly, there isn't just one thing that causes a person to leave their stable job. That's as true now as it has ever been. Instead, it's a culmination of several experiences that add up to an overwhelming desire to seek work elsewhere.

Let's take a closer look at some of these.

Toxic Work Culture

The average American spends more time at work than at home during any week. That's a lot of time to spend in an environment that isn't suitable.

MIT analyzed 34 million online employee profiles and found a toxic work culture to be the strongest predictor of industry attrition. Furthermore, work culture is so influential that it is ten times more important in predicting employee turnover than compensation.

“Company culture” is one of those buzz phrases people in human resources like to throw around in job descriptions and interviews. But what does it mean to have a toxic company culture?

Lack of Diversity

The MIT study found that failing to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) was one of the leading elements contributing to toxic workplace culture. And yet, only 34%

of companies have enough resources to support DEI initiatives.² Furthermore, only 27% of companies understand how to measure the effectiveness of a DEI strategy.

Diversity applies to several factors, including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and ability. Unfortunately, hiring managers often have implicit biases that keep them from hiring a diverse workforce, leaving employees who do not conform with the majority feeling left out and underrepresented.

Think about what you're doing for employees who represent diversity in the workplace: women, Black people, indigenous people, people with disabilities (or differing abilities), people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, and people who are older or younger than most of your workforce.

In addition to losing employees, your organization may face litigation if you don't prioritize diversity and inclusion. Every year, employers settle around \$500 million in equal opportunity complaints. I don't want to see your name on a

² (2022 workplace DEI report 2022)

deposition or court document because you don't know how to hire and lead a diverse team.

High Turnover/Reorganization

Feeling engaged at work is difficult when you constantly worry about losing your job. It can also be demotivating to watch your workload double because a co-worker was laid off or sent to work on another team.

MIT found that employee turnover is higher among companies that frequently turn to reorganization and layoffs. These factors make it more likely that employees will negatively view their employers and be more likely to seek employment elsewhere.

Burnout/Exhaustion

There's a critical difference between working hard to get your job done and working so much that you cannot keep up with your normal activities. The latter is known as burnout, affecting more people than ever.

During the pandemic, healthcare workers, teachers, and hospitality workers suffered staggeringly from burnout. However, burnout is happening pretty much across the board. APA's 2021 Work and Well-being Survey found that 79% of employees were experiencing job-related stress.³

Additionally, 32% experienced emotional exhaustion, 36% reported cognitive weariness, and 44% of employees were physically exhausted. That last number is significant because it indicates a shocking 38% increase in physical fatigue among workers across industries since 2019.

Lack of Work-Life Balance

One leading cause of burnout is a lack of work-life balance. Many companies insist that employees work well past the standard 40-hour work week. The acceleration of digital tools for work (i.e., email, text, and mobile phones) can make it difficult for employees to feel like they fully get away from work. They're essentially "on-call" at all hours of the day and night.

During the pandemic, many people were forced to start

³ (Abramson, *Burnout, and stress are everywhere* 2022)

working from home. They realized that they had more time in their day to focus on their families, their health, and other aspects of their lives. In addition, removing a commute and mindless chatter with office co-workers helped millions become more productive at work and more fulfilled in their personal lives.

Employees don't want to "grind" anymore. They've proven that they can be just as (if not more) effective when they have space to also focus on their personal lives. As a result, companies that demand employees to work long hours or commute to the office when they could just as efficiently work remotely are losing talented workers in droves. These employees are embracing the phenomenon known as "Quiet Quitting", a rejection of overwork culture.

Lack of Recognition

Employees don't necessarily need participation trophies; however, they enjoy it when their hard work and dedication to a company are rewarded. MIT found that employees are more likely to leave when their company fails to recognize and reward high performers.

While financial recognition (i.e., a raise or bonus) is appreciated, informal credit can go a long way. It can be as simple as a text message or email letting a team member know their work was recognized and appreciated. Knowing their efforts aren't going unnoticed helps employees stay motivated and engaged, leading to higher retention rates.

Lack of Opportunities

Companies with toxic cultures aren't the only ones losing talent amid The Great Resignation. Some companies may have a good or neutral culture but fail to provide the right opportunities to keep employees. Let's take a look at what some of those opportunities are.

Higher Pay

Naturally, compensation is a big deal, especially when we're in the middle of the highest inflation rates in over 30 years and are preparing for a seemingly inevitable recession.

A Pew Research study found that the number one reason

employees were leaving their jobs was because the pay was too low, which was reported by 63% of respondents.⁴ Of these employees, over half (56%) said they were able to find a new job that paid more than the one they left.

A Lever study found a slight generational difference between those who would rather stay at a company that pays more versus businesses that provide a sense of purpose.⁵ Between four generations (Baby Boomers, people born between 1946-1964; Gen X, born 1965-1976; Millennials born 1977-1994; and Gen Z, born 1995-2010), only two, Baby Boomers and Gen Z rated a sense of purpose as more significant than pay when choosing where to work. Millennials and Gen X overwhelmingly prioritize higher compensation over having a sense of organizational purpose.

Considering these generations will be in the workforce for the next several decades, companies should take notice and prioritize paying people what they're worth instead of getting away with paying employees as little as possible.

⁴ (Parker & Horowitz, *Majority of workers who quit a job in 2021 cite low pay, no opportunities for advancement, feeling disrespected* 2022)

⁵ (*The state of internal mobility and employee retention report* 2022)

Options for Career Advancement

Interestingly, the same percentage of respondents that said they were seeking employment elsewhere because of low pay also said they wanted more opportunities for career advancement.

Many workers have realized that they've gone as far as they can within an organization. With the retirement age steadily increasing, these employees are looking at working for at least five years longer than the previous generation before they can receive full retirement benefits.⁶ So, why would they want to spend those years working somewhere that won't give them a chance to ever go beyond their current position?

Of course, sometimes, an employee simply outgrows their current company. This can be particularly true in smaller organizations with fewer options for people to advance into leadership roles. But, more often than not, there are options to promote current employees instead of hiring from the outside. Companies must shift their focus from constantly

⁶ (*Social Security Fact Sheet*)

looking outward to figuring out how to advance current team members and promote from within.

Internal Mobility

While many want to advance in their careers, some employees want to switch roles without getting promoted.

A report from Lever found that 33% of employees don't feel like they can pursue a new internal role within their organization. Another 21% of employees don't think they can even approach the subject of seeking a new internal position with their manager, and 13% are unsure of whom to talk to about making an internal change within their organization.

The same study found that 61% of employees said they would search for a new role if their organization didn't allow them to make an internal change, and 67% said they would leave their organizations altogether if internal mobility were not an option.

These numbers demonstrate that employees don't necessarily want to leave their organizations to pursue new opportunities. Instead, they want to work for companies

that will allow them to build knowledge and skills that can be used to pursue new opportunities as they grow in their field. More than that, they want to work with leaders who will help them identify options and help them build a career path that benefits them as individuals and the organization as a whole.

Yet they all boil down to one common theme: employees are fed up with being overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated by companies who insist on putting profits over people.

Connect with Anton

I am grateful that you have taken the time to read this book. I hope that it has been helpful to you. I would love to hear from you about how you have applied the principles in this book. Please get in touch with me in the following ways:

- See my quotes, videos, and photos on Instagram @ antonjgunn
- Read automated posts and impromptu rants on Twitter @antonjgunn
- Connect for business content on LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/in/antonjgunn/>

Gain free training resources on my YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/antonjgunn>

If you would like to help spread this message or continue the conversation with leaders in any organization, here are five ways you can help:

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5. Most importantly, if you're looking to hire a dynamic, engaging speaker for your next event or need a leadership expert who can help you create a world-class culture in your organization using these principles, visit www.antonjgunn.com or email me directly at anton@antonjgunn.com.

Other books by Anton J. Gunn

*The Audacity of Leadership: 10 Essentials to Becoming a
Transformative Leader in the 21st Century*

*The Presidential Principles: How to Inspire Action
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