

The 'Great Resentment' is coming - and it's led by women

You've heard of the Great Resentment, the Great Reshuffle, and perhaps even speculation about the Great Regret. But I've got bad news for startup leaders: the worst is yet to come.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Signs indicate that an increasing number of workers are feeling undervalued, unsupported, and underpaid. Whether it's bosses mandating a return to the office, or pay rises that aren't keeping pace with inflation, the labour market is currently perfectly primed for the next big trend: The Great Resentment.

The 'Great Resentment' is on track to be characterised by a growing portion of the workforce who feel alienated from their role or employer. These people aren't quitting (jitters around a looming recession are keeping people in the safety of existing roles) but they aren't happy.

For staff being pushed unwillingly back into offices, their work-life balance is up to 40% worse than their bosses, and employee sentiment levels are near-record lows as a result. Overall, more than a third of UK workers say that they feel unhappy in their jobs. This means they're mentally checking out or doing the bare minimum in their roles to get by.

Naturally, this is a terrible situation for both employee and employer should it go unchecked. Employers urgently need to empower their teams - financially, culturally and through ways of working which meet their needs - if they're to stand any chance of retaining them now.

It might sound new, but the foundations of the Great Resentment have been forming since the start of the pandemic. And it stems from the same burnout which triggered the first waves of resignations.

Few workers have been left untouched by pressures to keep businesses afloat against the backdrop of spiraling economies, the blurring of lines between our professional and our personal lives, and by personal anxieties around our own finances, families and wellbeing. As a result, burnout has been rife. But women who face additional pressures - such as childcare responsibilities - have been disproportionately affected.

As a result, the Great Resentment is on track to affect women the most.

Female managers have borne more of the weight of responsibility for other colleagues' wellbeing during the pandemic, compared to their male counterparts. Plus, women are more likely to hold additional responsibilities for DEI, mentoring and advocating for underrepresented groups. All this means that the gap in burnout between women and men almost doubled over the last year. But what women really resent is the fact that this additional 'office housework' too often goes unrecognised.

Whilst 70% of companies believe that these contributions by women are critical, less than a quarter formally recognise their efforts during performance reviews. It's a recipe for resentment.

This issue is further compounded by ongoing pay disparity. Latest figures confirm that the gender pay gap has barely budged over the past year - it currently stands at 9.8%, meaning that women are paid just 90p for every £1 earned by a man. Additionally, female workers who ask for a pay rise have almost half the success rate of male workers. So if women didn't

already resent doing more work for less pay than their male counterparts, the current cost of living crisis will make salary disparity sting all the more.

Equitable remuneration is essential for female employees to feel valued. But salary top ups alone won't eradicate burnout. Nor will they make for the kind of supportive and flexible working environment which could help prevent unnecessary stress and reduce feelings of resentment.

Lack of flexibility is a core part of the Great Resentment. Women are more likely to shoulder childcare and domestic responsibilities on top of their professional workloads. So it's not surprising that, according to our recent survey, almost 75% of women under the age of 55 say that they care strongly about having flexibility over their working hours and location - a means of fitting competing duties around each other, and carving out more work-life balance. Overworked and burnout female workforces have had the most to gain from the shift towards remote work. Now, as half of employers plan on full-time office returns, they have the most to lose.

Since less than half of men over the age of 55 said that flexibility matters to them in the same survey, it's overwhelmingly women's needs which are being sidelined as Jacob Rees Mogg, James Dyson and the likes lead calls for workers to get back to offices. But failing to consult women on back-to-office plans won't end well for anyone.

At best, staff who are forced unwilling into offices will be unhappy and unproductive. (Despite the myths, evidence has proven that non-office based work is far more likely to increase productivity than have the opposite effect.) And there's no prizes for guessing where they'll go: 71% of women under the age of 55 say that they'd be more likely to opt for roles that offer flexibility.

Masses of female talent and staff productivity stands to be lost during the predicted Great Resentment. For companies who want to avoid this fate, more equitable workloads, fair pay, and better systems to support, recognise and reward staff is a good place to start. Employee empowerment is also essential.

Since no two workers - female or otherwise - will have the same needs and working preferences, employers must seek their opinions and offer choice. For one member of staff, a four day week could improve work-life balance and reduce stress. For the next, enhanced parental leave could make the biggest difference.

This is the beauty of flexible work. There are any number of ways it can be tailored to suit different people. And where feelings of resentment overwhelmingly stem from individual needs being overlooked, it's the best tool employers have to stop the Great Resentment in its tracks.

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