



LET THE GREAT COMBACK BEGIN!

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SO. YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE READY TO RETURN TO THE OFFICE. HERE'S WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN THEY RECONNECT AFTER WORKING FROM HOME FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS.

As the working world slowly inches back to post-COVID normalcy, many employees are asking themselves this question right now: "Should I jump ship, grin and bear it, or recommit?"

At the same time, business leaders are asking a very similar question about their workers: "Will they resign from the job, resign themselves to the new workplace, or re-sign up?"

But maybe bosses should spend more time asking a different question: "When they return, how can we keep them?"

There are two unavoidable truths of The Great Employee Resignation. One is that employees will "come as they are," in whatever mindset they have. The other is that most leaders won't have that same luxury. They can't come as they are. They have to return with a new openness, understanding, and flexibility in the face of those employee mindsets.

My research suggests that returning employees will fall into one of three categories—returning with burning, churning, or yearning—or some combination of the three. And astute leaders will do well to recognize and prepare for all three. How? By understanding what to expect when employees reconnect.

The best way to do this might be to simply ask, “If you had to describe your feeling about returning to work, would you say you’re returning with ‘burning,’ with ‘churning,’ or with ‘yearning’?” The objective would be to identify what might be standing in the way of achieving win-wins with all three categories.



CATEGORY #1: RETURNING WITH BURNING

“Burning” employees are those who return with a high level of enthusiasm, anxious to get back to the workplace or project. Burners appear to be sure about their commitment to the company, their job, and their career and, as a result, are “burning” for:

- Social connection: They’re ready to re-engage with coworkers in the before-, during-, or after-work activities they’ve been missing over the last 18+ months.
- Spontaneity: They’re looking forward to the natural, informal interactions, like brainstorming, that best arise when people are closer to Zoom allows.
- Exchange of ideas: They’re anxious to get their creative juices flowing again, and to engage in the kind of interactions and sharing that give rise to innovative ideas and projects.
- Re-acquaintance with the business: They may feel they’ve lost the connection between themselves and the business and are looking forward to rekindling it. So, how do leaders welcome back—and keep—employees who return with burning?

CATEGORY #2: RETURNING WITH CHURNING

Churning employees are those who return but are unsettled or uncertain about their commitment to the company, the job, or their career.

According to Prudential Financials' Pulse of the American Worker survey, 26 percent of U.S. workers are preparing to look for new employment opportunities, 80 percent are concerned about their career advancement, and 72 percent say the pandemic caused them to rethink their skill sets.

Regardless of which statistical segment they represent, churners are reassessing what they want from their work and the workplace. Some are disillusioned or bored. Most have new, but unsure expectations of their employers and workplaces.

CHURN CHAT

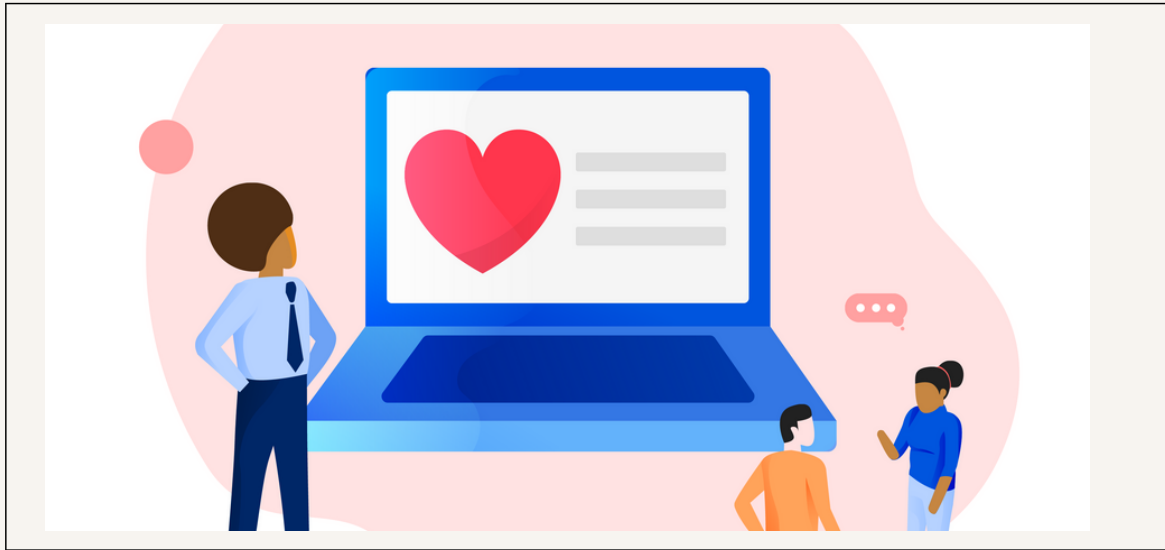
A churn chat is a one-on-one during which the manager and churning employee discuss the source of the churn and possible solutions. Begin by asking, "What is causing your 'churn?'" In other words:

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What's keeping you from feeling glad to be back? Why? (Elicit both professional and personal reasons.) Keep asking "What else?" questions.
- Are you still weighing the pros and cons or waiting for a sign that coming back is the right choice? What would that "sign" look like?
- Are you concerned that the pandemic blocked the road you were on here, or obscured the path you thought was open to you when you left? Let's talk more about that.
- Are you re-thinking your skill sets or career path? If so, how can I help?



CATEGORY #3 RETURNING WITH YEARNING



Historically, organizational expectations and demands have impacted or even dictated employees' personal lives and demanded personal concessions. But the pandemic has given many employees the time and energy to gain new knowledge, skills, awareness, and confidence.

Those who weren't successful in a training setting may have discovered they can learn more on their own. They may have completed courses or certifications complementary to or distinct from their typical or recognized talents. They may be returning with a new understanding of how valuable they are. They may have reassessed their potential and options and are returning better equipped—personally and professionally—to declare, defend, and demand employer concessions.

"Whatever their reasons, they're returning with a yearning for:

- Recognition: A desire to be told what value they bring, specifics of a good piece of work, and ongoing appreciation.
- Resolution: A wish to have something left "on the table" resolved, perhaps an opportunity that is now possible.
- Change or Improvements: An affirmative answer to an earlier request that had to be put aside.
- Newfound independence: A chance to take complete responsibility for a project that would stretch or even taste their abilities.



The Great Comeback facing The Great Resignation won't be simple. This means leaders must recognize that employees will come as they are, that organizations may need to adjust, and that knowing what to expect and respect will make the whole experience far more rewarding.

Whether faced with employees who are returning with burning, churning, or yearning, leaders who can learn to accept and manage them are poised to make the comeback as strong as the setback.

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Beverly Kaye, Ph.D. is recognized as one of the most knowledgeable professionals in career development, employee engagement, and retention. In 2018, she received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association for Talent Development (ATD). Her books include Love 'Em or Lose 'Em and Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go.