



## Four reframes to **curb attrition** and go from **crisis to control**

If you've returned to work this year with gaping holes in your team or across your organisation, you're likely all too familiar with 'the great resignation'. It seems covid has been a catalyst for people to re-think their priorities. It's led to historic numbers quitting, prompting a talent war and wage inflation across the UK, USA and Europe.

The unfortunate reality is that this situation is likely to persist or potentially worsen. So many news articles dwell on this. They state sensational statements like: "Resignation nation: Record numbers quit their jobs before the holidays" and "£150k starting salaries as firms fight for staff". Often, they debate why people are off ("Unravelling the mystery of the Great Resignation"). Less prevalent are articles offering insights as to what we need to lead us through it. Perhaps their scarcity simply reflects the difficulty of offering meaningful solutions to a multi-layered problem in a single article. Let's face it, there's unlikely to be a one-size-fits all solution for start-ups, SMEs and super-sized corporates, or even for different teams within the same organisation.

But the 'big resignation' can't mean we resign ourselves to accepting prolonged

staffing gaps that will inevitably impact the health of our teams and the wealth of our organisations. So, while I don't claim to have all (or even any) of the answers, I do think there are some critical questions we can ask ourselves if we're serious about attracting and retaining top talent.

It's a topic I'm keen to explore as the year unfolds, and I'd love this to be the beginnings of a two-way conversation. To kick us off, here are my initial thoughts: Four leadership lenses I believe will help us better see and navigate this bleak backdrop of attrition so that instead of the 'big quit' 2022 becomes a 'big hit'.

### **Is our home, headquarters or hybrid approach helping or hindering us?**

Alpha, delta, omicron. While we all long for this pandemic to be over and to get 'back to normal', the most recent news that the virus is mutating again, with the World Health Organisation now monitoring for an aptly named 'Mu' strain, suggests it's not leaving us anytime soon.

As we enter year three, organisations must go beyond simply making the tech available to work from home if they want to fully benefit from flexible working. Yet

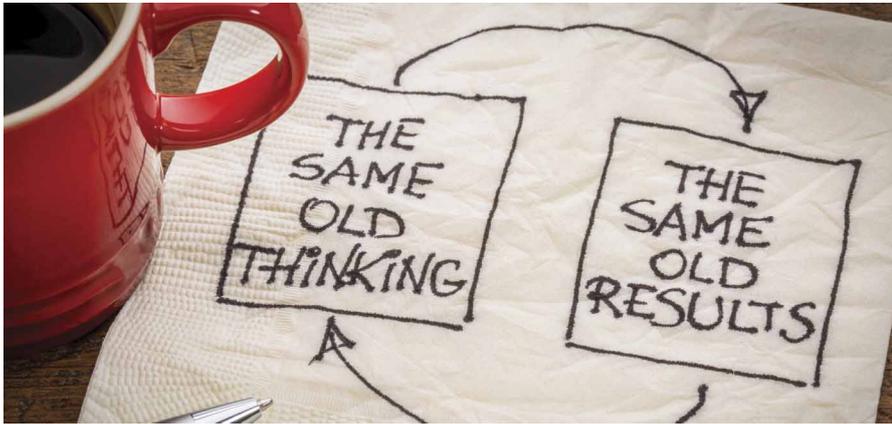
many are alienating and angering their people with their response to the home, headquarters or hybrid conundrum.

"I've gone above and beyond while working from home for two years. Now you're treating me like a toddler by dictating I must be in the office half the week, even stipulating which days – that's not flexibility."

What's needed is a pragmatic and iterative approach. This issue is multi-layered because where and when people work must benefit the organisation, the team, and the individual.

Organisations need to recognise there isn't going to be a one size for all approach and that they won't get it right first time. To avoid frustrating their people, they need to be honest about that and communicate what they are trialling, how it's evolving and why.

Some of the better approaches I'm seeing are organisation-wide frameworks that define as little as possible but as much as required – frameworks that trust leaders to determine what's going to work best for their teams and the individuals within them. Even if everyone doesn't like an approach, people will come along if they understand the why, and that what's proposed isn't the final



fix – it's a 'try before we buy' approach which we'll evaluate and evolve.

### Are we still recruiting in our own image?

If we want to widen the talent pool, avoid 'groupthink' and drive more innovation, there's no better time than now to take a long hard look at our team's composition and remind ourselves that talent comes in all shapes and sizes. Attracting and retaining different and diverse talent means doing things differently. It means getting comfortable with the fact that we'll probably mess up along the way, we won't always get it right, and we'll say the wrong thing.

Conversations with people who think, look, speak and act differently from us aren't always comfortable, but it's for exactly this reason that, when done well, they are so valuable. It requires us to intentionally improve our listening to a level that author and TED speaker, Celeste Headlee, refers to as 'transformative listening'. This is where we enter a conversation with a willingness to change our mind about something. Being prepared to listen at this level, with an appreciation that we don't have all the answers and can evolve our thinking, is the path towards a culture that attracts a broader range of talented people.

### Are we ready to face the next crisis?

If we've learned one thing over recent years, it's to expect the unexpected. While we continue to hope the pandemic soon fades, what we know for sure is that the pace of change continues to accelerate – further disruptions aren't far away. Change is now the norm, not the exception. How rapidly and readily we respond is determined by our resilience, defining our own and our organisation's

future success.

The good news is each time we work through a challenge we're internalising a library of learnings and strengthening the resilience we and our organisations need to respond to those pressures.

When a business leaks experienced talent it not only seeps critical skills but its collective strength. It's why we need all our people to continuously build resilience – even in times of relative calm – since we never know when the sands will shift and we'll need to call on it.

And that brings me to the fourth and final question:

### Are we leading and seeding a lifelong learning culture?

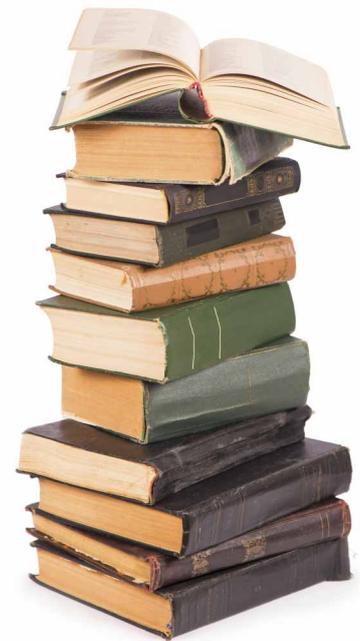
*"Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers."*

Harry S. Truman, 33rd US president.

More recent leaders, including Barack Obama and Bill Gates, are famed for finding five hours a week to read and learn. You only need to look at their much-shared reading lists to see that their curiosity for subjects stretches far beyond what they 'do'. And today we needn't even pick up a book. We can rest our tired eyes while someone reads to us via Audible and the like. Yet whatever our learning preferences, for our thinking and capabilities to keep pace with so much change we must remain curious. To enhance innovation, rather than let skills stagnate, we need to model a growth mind-set and a lifelong approach to learning.

People are walking away for a variety of reasons but there are things we can do as leaders and organisations to encourage them to stay. I suggest this includes helping them feel included, trusted, valued and developed, but as I said at the outset, I don't claim to have all the answers, so I'd love your views.

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