

# RISE OF THE GREATS

The post-Covid landscape has changed the world of work significantly, as companies adapt to the Great Resignation, Great Reawakening, Great Reshuffle and Great Unretirement. It's all the more prudent for HR strategies to evolve and adjust to The Greats.

BY ATLEHANG RAMATHESELE

**T**he world of work has undergone a staggering transformation in the last three years. The advent, survival and aftermath of the global pandemic has encouraged people to examine their prospects more and duly changed everything for employers and employees alike.

Mounting dissatisfaction and disillusionment among the workforce coupled with some organisations being sluggish to meet such challenges has made for a paradigm shift, influencing how companies operate and employees engage with their work. A new work revolution has spawned, where career and workplace re-evaluation has been at a record high.

All the “Greats” are no longer just buzzwords, but genuine shapers of conversation in the workplace. Either people are “quiet quitting” by doing the bare minimum to keep their jobs, resigning for greener pastures, exploring brand new frontiers by pursuing different industries altogether or retirees are back with a bang and kick starting their careers all over again. It makes for fertile ground for HR professionals to reimagine how to approach it all.

## The landscape

Chief People and Culture officer at Liberty 2 Degrees Yongie Ntene believes that it starts with acknowledging the evolution of the naming convention for the HR function from Human Resources to Human Capital and/or People.

“I believe this is indicative of the complementary role the function plays in the business, and thus, it becomes our duty and obligation to proactively create future-fit environments for people to show up authentically, and spaces for them to belong,” she says.

She believes this has also spilled into what employees now choose to place emphasis on in the workplace; with flexibility, felt experiences, psychological and physiological safety being at the forefront with a strong correlation to employee retention.

“We saw this play out during the pandemic. Albeit a peculiar scenario, employees executed on their deliverables, met deadlines, closed deals, continued with business-as-usual in the comfort of their own homes, and in between picking up groceries on the way back from the school run or yoga class,” she says.



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Genevieve Koolen



Michael Gullan

The onus is therefore on HR professionals to determine how to refine ways of work.

“Our levers of focus in shaping the future of work should lean more towards subscription to individuation of our people in the workplace and ensuring that our environments have a sense of safety in terms of physical, financial and most importantly, emotionally,” she says.

### Seizing opportunities

Yongie says that the enhancement of technology is also crucial for organisations.

“This goes both ways, for employer and employee. I think human capital professionals need to keep ways of redesigning learning and development strategies top of mind to incorporate elements of technology and digitisation, given the integral part it plays in our day-to-day lives,” she explains.

In order to boost employee retention and remain a competitive employer of choice in this current climate, there is more to be done. “Over and above the go-to considerations such as competitive remuneration, invaluable employee value propositions and clear career paths, I think it boils down to bringing life to the organisation’s values so that people are

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able to see and believe what you say,” says Yongie.

Genevieve Koolen, Human Resources director at SAP Africa, acknowledges the dramatic transformative nature the Great Resignation and quiet quitting has had on the way organisations manage their workforces.

“Amid workplace instability and global economic downturn is a very real need for companies to return to high levels of productivity and innovation. To achieve this, organisations have to find common ground with employees and an effective way to retain top talent,” she says.

### Disconnected workplaces

The reality is a need to relook workplace boundaries.

“There’s no guidebook for how companies should



Yongie Ntene

go about this. Creating a new world of work will require courage, collaboration and clear communication with employees at all levels,” she adds.

In any iteration of The Greats, it is well documented that the move from offices and onto screens has resulted in shifts in how people relate and connect in the workplace.

Michael Gullan, CEO of G&G Advocacy says that business leaders, HR and employees are left navigating a disconnected workplace.

“The way we connect with our colleagues has forever changed, making it difficult for many businesses to thrive in tough economic conditions,” he says. “Employees need enduring and trusting connections with their colleagues to solve complicated challenges and move businesses forward.”

Yongie echoes that consistent communication with multiple layers of ensuring transparency and building and maintaining trust is paramount.

“Disconnect in the context of organisational culture often stems from a breakdown in communication, or broken trust and spending enough time harnessing those key elements helps to create a safe environment for all employees,” she explains. ●

## THREE TOP EMPLOYEE PRIORITIES

Yongie’s focus areas for prioritising employees during the Rise of the Greats period are:

- **Holistic wellness:** Emotional, financial, mental and physical wellness have been the most topical conversation over the last three years. She attributes it to all the loss employees have experienced – of jobs, lives of loved ones and people.
- **Belonging:** People want to feel seen, heard and in a safe space where they belong.
- **Flexibility:** We need to create environments where people are able to do the things they would ordinarily do outside of working hours, at work.

## TRIED AND TESTED TACTICS

Genevieve shared some practical tips for HR leaders to embrace the rise of The Great workplace too. These include:

- **Designating duties:** Office environments often lend themselves to employees running the risk of being lured into work that isn’t part of their job scope. “While there can be upside for employees taking on extra responsibility as a way of learning or expanding their network, companies need to be realistic about expectations and keep the balance between productivity and creating an unhealthy workplace. A recognition system for those who go the extra mile is also helpful in creating some reward,” she says.
- **Access alignment:** The new era in workplace culture has seen a soaring disinterest in non-core tasks such as company events attendance or company team-building participation, as some employees have disengaged from the broader company vision. “There is no easy fix for this. Companies will need to work with employees to reframe their vision and culture fit for the new world of work. Employees in turn will need to acknowledge that, in order to achieve broader organisational goals and drive the business forward, some compromises must be made,” she says.
- **Vivid vision:** It is vital for organisations to attract and motivate staff according to what their actual focus is, and be transparent about company vision and values. “While creating healthy work environments with more focus on employee wellbeing is top of mind, this must be balanced with the need to generate growing profits, to fulfil shareholder commitments and to compete effectively in tough economic conditions. There is a fine line to be walked between people, purpose and profit which is ultimately linked to shareholder value. Creating the right balance between these three will likely help to attract and retain the best talent for each environment,” she explains.