

Did Leadership Failure Contribute to the Great Resignation?

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Listening to business owners, leaders, human resource professionals, and recruiters lamenting about the lack of people to hire is perplexing. Frankly, it surprises me that they cannot think out of the box. These influential individuals are confused at the current and ongoing "Great Resignation or Great Reshuffle" or, in some circles, "Great Disgruntled or Great Discontented". Thinking nothing was going to happen is very naive.

The dissatisfied, displeased, unhappy, resentful, angry, and disenfranchised employees have been growing within work for a significant amount of time. This isn't a new condition, but finally, one that leaders must listen to and act upon.

What makes an unresponsive leader?

An [unresponsive leader](#) is a leader who cannot emotionally connect with their employees. They consider the needs or requests of their employees as trivial or unimportant. Their inability to be empathetic (the ability to understand and share another person's feelings) often shows up as sympathetic feelings of pity for someone else's situation. Because empathy requires high levels of emotional intelligence, it is one of the most underutilized emotions of poor leadership.

There are widespread complaints about the failure to lead modern American business organizations. Leaders are described as incapable of understanding the need for change, being "out of touch with their business," "too busy with self-preservation," and being inadequate to their appointed task. They often set double standards regarding respect and consideration for their employees, sending a message of distrust and hypocrisy.

Employees are looking for a more fertile work environment

In 2018, employees became disillusioned with the lack of wage increases. It began in July and lasted through September, with [2.4 % of the U.S.](#) workforce voluntarily quitting their jobs. They got tired of the wait for change. And so it became increasingly apparent that employees had to quit their jobs and look elsewhere to get a raise or be treated with dignity and respect.

The blind eye of the employer to employee needs brought it all to a head. Employees were still sick and tired of being sick and tired. There was little or no appreciation or care about them. The lack of trust escalated with the pandemic. Flexibility was unheard of, hours were overwhelming, budgets too tight to hire more people, and advancement was unattainable. Remote work was non-existent, training was sparse, and pay was miserable. A [Gallup study](#) of nearly 7,500 full-time employees found that 23% felt burned out. Many eligible for retirement retired early.

Employees watched as corporate greed flourished and safety diminished. It was as if things were in hold mode, as employees witnessed employers take unethical shortcuts to reach that bottom line – to impress investors and rack in those bonuses.

The employee watched as leaders with a particular lifestyle took home the big bucks, worked "regular" hours, took the family on vacation, and didn't worry about the employee's needs. After all, they had a job, and what else could they want?

Why the surge continues

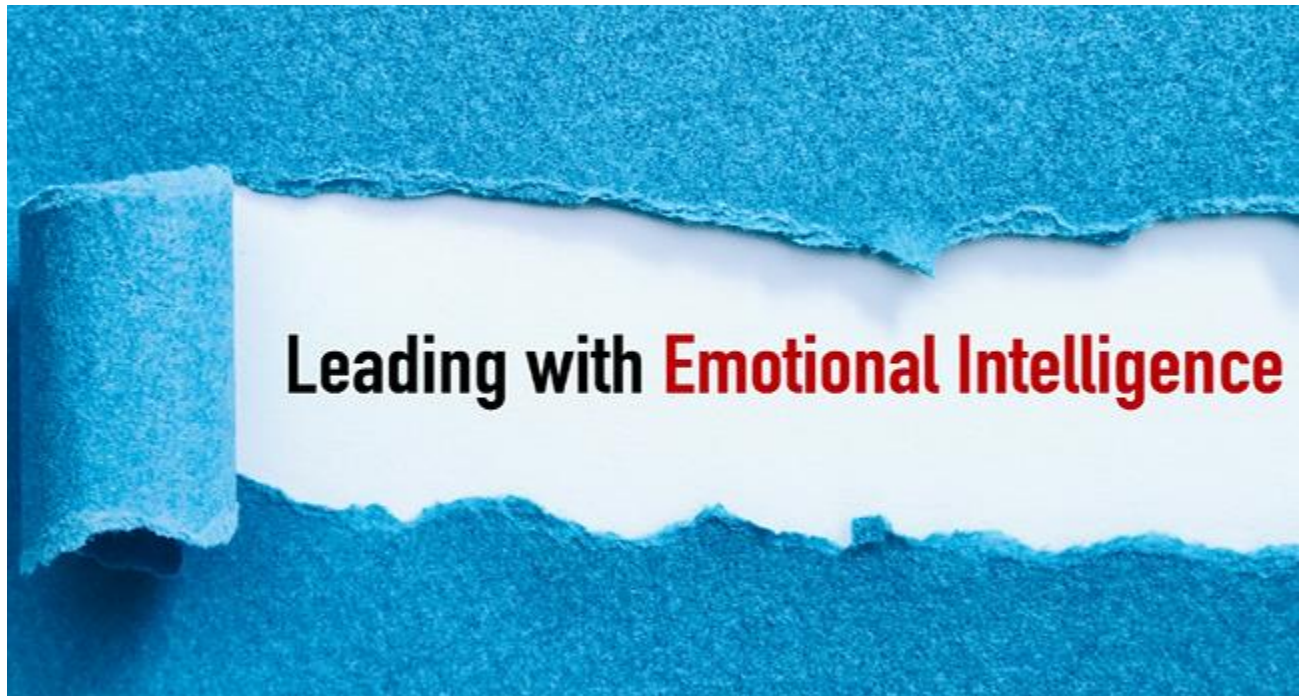


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Another [Gallup analysis](#) finds that 48% of America's population is actively job-searching for better and more rewarding opportunities. In other research, changing jobs is on the minds of almost 50% of U.S. employees, which impacts both small and large businesses. In early 2022, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) stated that the number of employees quitting their jobs was approximately [4.3 million](#). Leadership failure is an ever-present concern for organizations. Leadership failure occurs when leadership is incapable, ineffective, or inconsistent with the context and challenges. Despite the importance of leadership to society and organizational success, failures abound.

While the failure of leadership is not a new phenomenon, it illustrates the simplicity of the underlying issues, particularly in addressing and managing the key strategic aspects of emotional intelligence. Leaders must learn to treat employees with dignity and respect, empathy and sympathy, care, and common courtesy. Employers in today's marketplace must bring these skills to the boardroom, factory floor, office, and computer screen.

What the modern leader must embrace



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In the history of humanity, there hasn't been an example of success without strong leadership. With every snapshot in time, a leader is steering the wheel toward greatness or demise. Make no mistake about it, especially good leaders are hard to find. Failure to identify leaders early can create a ripple effect through one's organization. This can lead to dissatisfaction, poor performance, and even worse, failure.

Business leaders often are astonished when presented with "how do you treat your employees?" Employers believe it isn't easy, and they are right. They have many roles to fill, clients and customers to please, competitors to fight against. They are inundated with work that often gets in the way of dealing with personnel issues.

However, they forget that doing the right thing and treating people with dignity and respect is part of the job.

So, how does a modern business leader treat employees? The answer is simple: treatment should be based on the benefits of the other party, not on a self-impressed ego.

The modern leader must learn:

- **Dignity and respect** - Modern leaders treat their employees with dignity and respect.

- o They understand the importance of the balance between work and leisure environments. Businesses are comprised of people with families, friends, and a life outside of work.

- o Employees are the backbone of all companies. They make the wheels turn; they turn ideas into projects and projects into profits. Never underestimate the value of each employee.

- o The cardinal rule is to show *respect* in how you treat them and talk about them to others.

- o Regardless of how you or anyone outside the company feels about its current performance, the people inside the company deserve to be treated with *dignity*. First, because they have intrinsic worth as human beings, and second, because they have earned the right to be exactly who and where they are due to the journey that brought them to this moment.

- **Ethics** - A modern business leader should be honest and ethically deal with every person and every problem. Being an ethical leader means behaving appropriately inside and outside the office. It means having and demonstrating strong values through *actions, words, and behaviors*. The [Harvard Business Review](#) states that ethical leaders will not overlook wrongdoing, even if it benefits their businesses. Ethical leaders operate from a transparent position.

- **Kindness and consideration** - To operate an efficient business, you need more than just skilled people. It would help if you had also motivated people who feel valued and appreciated for their efforts and input. Treating people equally, without prejudice or preconceived ideas, is the right way to be treated. Suspend

assumptions, judgments, or notions about people and activities. Be more observant and less opinionated by learning, understanding, and gathering the current situation before making mandates.

- **Know your employees** – Have a visit with the employee at onboarding and monthly after that. Start with a small set of questions you ask everyone to get to know them, about them, and their family. Let them know what they can expect from you, what you expect, and what they should know about you. Be vulnerable and open. Demonstrating your desire to know your employees and doing so builds trust. And trust builds loyalty.
- **Inclusive collaboration** – Ask opinions, and be open to cases for change. Be ready to include all employees in significant changes and those with a vested interest, such as departments, projects, etc., to provide input. Let everyone know when change is needed, and get feedback and ideas to support those changes. Engage small groups to problem-solve. Don't be afraid to get employee expertise.
- **Be a leader** – Modern leaders make decisions that inspire and build trust. A leader's outstanding *ability to assimilate* with their employees is required for success in the modern business world. Providing an environment that fosters communication and facilitates knowledge sharing is a catalyst for fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie among workers. Be an authentic leader, which means lead by example and do unto others....



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Much to the dismay of today's upwardly-mobile employees, the management archetype that built the modern American economy virtually disappeared during the 1980s. Gone are the days when emulating General Electric founder Jack Welch or Southwest Airlines CEO Herb Kelleher was considered management's holy grail. Today, genuinely successful leaders exhibit very different characteristics from their predecessors.

We live in an advanced, complex world. Although it was true in the past that leaders are only interested in the end result and are happy to step over people to get there, this is no longer the case. Businesses have become more globalized over the past decade. In this circumstance, employers must understand how to lead employees. If the employer's leadership skills are not up-to-date, it can quickly cost the trust of their employees and seriously affect productivity. It also leads to employees quitting their jobs.

Summary:

Reflecting on the challenges of the last 18 or so months, many of us look for answers about why America had to endure yet another great tragedy. After much research, I believe the answer is a leadership void. CEOs deserted their leadership duty throughout the country and failed to lead their companies through hard times. This failure to lead created widespread chaos throughout the world. This chaos trickled down and affected our everyday lives. This did not need to happen if heads of business and industry had made more intelligent decisions. Business leaders have contributed to several factors in shaping the current economy. Some factors which have led to the current situation have been poor decision-making, greed, and simply not having an adequate understanding of their employees, changing trends, and the global economy. It's a fact that these business leaders played a significant role in the great resignation.

There are many reasons leaders double down on failed behaviors, such as stubbornness, self-confidence, and the myth that all people love routines to implement change. Successful change is not seeking new employees who can think differently or build a flexible culture. It's a matter of identifying and understanding your employees, and embracing new skills and strategies to build productivity, retention, and engagement.