

Member's Quarterly

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Ask the Expert

Boomerang Employees: The Good, the Bad & the Ugly



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Q: Should you welcome back boomerang employees?

A: As recently as 20 years ago, most employers had policies prohibiting the rehiring of employees who left them. That has changed now in an era of a more transient labour force and high costs associated with recruitment and turnover.

Regardless of the trend, there are pros and cons to readmitting these boomerang employees and steps you can take to make wise decisions about whether to bring back a worker who already walked away from your organization.

The advantages center on culture and skill

Proponents of rehiring employees point out that unlike hiring an unknown worker, at least you know the skillset of the returning employee.

You also know these returning employees can hit the ground running because they know the system, where to find what they need and they have already built relationships with many of their colleagues and team members.

They also won't have any kind of culture shock. They are already well versed in the corporate culture and have self-knowledge about whether they can fit into it. They are at ease with the expected workload and work flow of the organization — another benefit.

In many ways, even though they left once, these employees can end up being more loyal. Some have gone out and explored the proverbial grass on the other side and determined that it wasn't always greener.

Research supports taking people back into the workplace

The latest research into boomerang employees suggest in most cases, taking them back makes good business sense.

T. Brad Harris, Professor of Labour and Employment Relations at University of Illinois, and his co-authors Stacie Furst-Holloway of the University of Cincinnati, Benson Rosen of the University of North Carolina and Abbie J. Shipp of Texas Christian University, discovered an important factor in how easy it is to come back again depends to a large extent on why the employee left in the first place.

Reporting their research in *Personnel Psychology*, they discovered that in most cases, the decision to pull up stakes and go wasn't because the employee was angry or dissatisfied. More often, it had to do with a personal matter like a spousal relocation, health issue, pregnancy or even an unexpected job offer that was just too good to refuse.

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Harris was also involved in another study on the topic that looked into how differences across the boomerang employees' experience affected their re-employment performance. The researchers looked at a sample of boomerang employees in the National Basketball Association as a basis for their study.

Not all boomerang employees are created equal

This team, which included Richard Gardner of Brigham Young University and Joseph Liu of the Georgia Institute of Technology, discovered that whether or not a company should take an employee back wasn't just a simple yes or no answer.

A lot depended on the employee and their employment history within the original organization and at their current place of employment.

The workers who left on good terms and on their own volition were better suited to work their way back peacefully and productively into the original workplace. Those who left with acrimony did not fare as well.

Another key factor centered on how long the employee was away. If they were gone too long, they did not accurately remember the organizational culture.

How the boomerang employee can help his or her cause

Any employee who wants to return to your company or organization should be able to demonstrate how in their time away, they grew in their profession and in their personal and industry-related development.

They should also understand and be prepared to handle a mixed reaction from their coworkers. Sometimes they return like celebrities and there is a great feeling of welcome and warmth. In other cases however, especially if the team members feel like they are being overlooked for a promotion so the employee can return and get the job, they may find knives in their back from the moment they arrive.

Either way, they must be able to cope, fit in and keep the work flowing.

The boomerang employee is becoming a trend

Regardless of the pros and cons, the rehiring of employees is now definitely on the rise.

A study on corporate culture and the boomerang employee by David Almeda and Dan Schawbel, author of *Promote Yourself: The New Rules to Career Success*, found in a national US survey of 1,800 HR professionals, that 76 percent of companies are now more willing to accept former employees.

Additionally, 85 percent of the HR professionals said they had received job applications from former employees in the past five years.

Make sure that you look at the pros and cons of rehiring each employee who wishes to return. You can then make the right decision accordingly.

Paula Morand is a keynote speaker, author and leadership expert who helps high potential visionaries and organizations take their brand and their business to the next level. She can be reached via email at bookings@paulamorand.com.