



February 2022 EN Insights Forum: *Executive Summary*

What we learned:

*Bonus checks are backfiring,
burned-out workers want a
breather, and the secret to
retaining women leaders is
belonging*

EN

A black and white photograph of a woman in a business suit, looking thoughtfully to the side with her hand on her chin. A large, stylized 'EN' logo is overlaid on the image, with orange curved lines framing the woman's face and the logo.

What the research tells us:

The CEOs and CHROs who gathered for the second EN Insights Forum of the year received some startling insights into the Great Resignation, along with valuable advice for retaining women leaders, a loss that leaves many organizations with badly broken leadership pipelines.

Check, please! From the SHRM Research team, **Dr. Ragan Decker** warns that even though December showed a slight decline in the quit rate the Great Resignation hasn't peaked yet. New SHRM data finds that nearly half of all workers are actively searching for a new job right now or plan to in the next few months.

What's more, the 2021 bonus payments being paid in the first quarter aren't working as a long-term retention tool: More than half of those employees planning to quit are simply waiting to grab their bonus checks on their way out.

“We might see an uptick in quit rates during that the first quarter, as those workers are potentially getting that year-end bonus and then deciding to leave.”

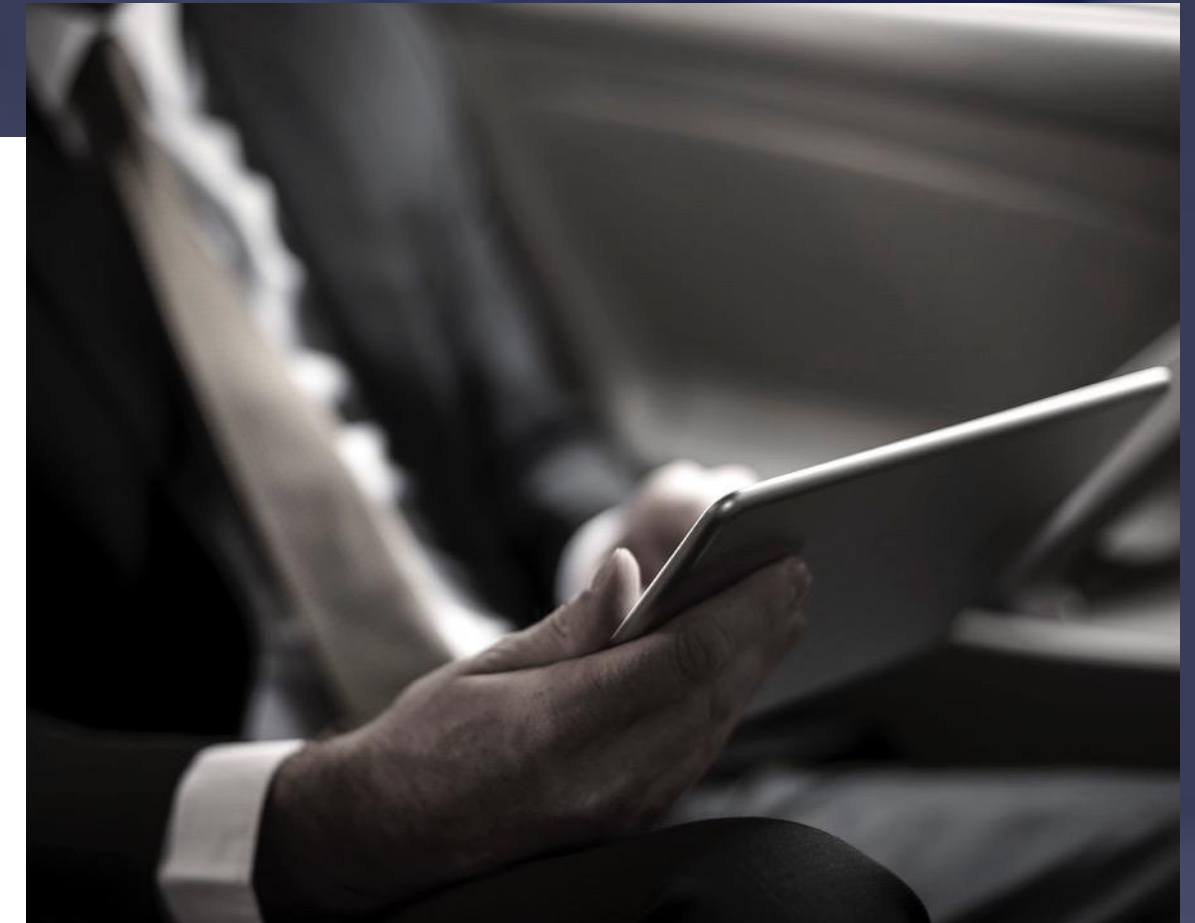
– *Dr. Ragan Decker*



Rested and ready

It's no surprise that worker burnout is at dangerous levels but the good news is that any organization hiring is likely to find new employees are ready to hit the ground running. SHRM data finds that nearly one-third of workers who quit within the last nine months hadn't lined up a new job.

Noted Dr. Decker: "People are burned out so, if they can afford it, people are giving themselves a break between jobs. That way, when they enter a new role they're feeling they can really put their best foot forward."



Let's do the numbers:

Workers who quit
in December¹

4.3 million

-0.2 million Change from
November²

Why they walked:



More
Money



Better work/
life balance



Better
benefits



Leadership lacked
empathy toward
workers



Workplace culture
or politics

1. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/jolts.pdf>
2. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/jolts_01042022.pdf

Ahead of International Women's Day, data shows that there is much more to be done



With International Women's Day coming March 8, the SHRM research team dug into the barriers female leaders face at work, and how those roadblocks leave promising women leaders disillusioned, frustrated, and searching for better opportunities elsewhere.

It *sounds* good when Fortune reports, "The number of women running businesses on the Fortune 500 hit an all-time record," including an all-time high for Black women. The reality is less impressive: Just 8% of Fortune 500 CEOs are female – a total of 41. And that impressive-sounding statistic on Black women CEOs works out to just two Black women holding the corner [office](#).

What are the risks?: A partial explanation comes from the SHRM data shared with the forum: More women in leadership positions are looking for jobs than women not in leadership positions. And among leaders overlooked for a promotion, female leaders of color are far more prone to see the snub as a warning to get out.

Caregiving, acceptance, and loneliness at the top: Female leaders with caregiving responsibilities are more likely to say the pandemic hurt their careers than men with the same responsibilities. Also, at work, female leaders overall feel less accepted and included by their peers, with female leaders of color being the most likely to feel this way.

Let's do the numbers:

41%

Female workers who are job-hunting

57%

Female leaders who are job-hunting

Quitting after no advancement:

White female leaders	4%
White male leaders	7%
Male leaders of color	8%
Female leaders of color	21%

How to fix it:

SHRM research finds that when organizations foster a sense of belonging in the workplace, employees are much more likely to stay on the job and therefore in the leadership pipeline.

Twenty-one percent of employees who quit within the last 9 months cited a lack of empathy from leaders as the reason for their departure, making this an especially important goal for executives. Empathy—which is all about understanding each person’s unique experiences without judgement or bias—is a skill that can be built. In fact, SHRM CEO Johnny C. Taylor Jr. has highlighted [how to eliminate this empathy deficit](#).

Warns Dr. Decker: “To retain women leaders, it's important for organizations to foster a sense of belonging, which can be achieved by creating a more inclusive workplace culture. Inclusion and belonging are important for all workers. Executives who overlook this risk their organization's culture, reputation, and retention rate.”

Employees looking for a new job:

At non-inclusive workplaces	51%
At inclusive workplaces	35%

Employees feeling respected and valued:

At non-inclusive workplaces	38%
At inclusive workplaces	92%

Employees recommending their organizations:

At non-inclusive workplaces	37%
At inclusive workplaces	90%

Empathy – which is all about understanding each person’s unique experiences without judgement or bias– is a skill that can be built.



Curology's Carolyn Frey accentuates the positive

Ms. Frey recommends taking a very positive approach to eliminating workplace friction, as well as creating an environment where workers can be comfortable while also making personal connections within their organizations. That includes mentoring, listening, speaking up, speaking out, and giving seemingly clueless leaders the benefit of the doubt.

Carolyn Frey is the Chief People Officer at Curology, a hyper-growth direct-to-consumer prescription skincare company. Carolyn served as the Chief People Officer at the national coffee chain Philz Coffee, where she was also responsible for marketing and sales. She spent 15 years as Managing Director at Corporate Executive Board, a leading provider of guidance and human capital analytics to Fortune 500 companies and beyond.

Don't start angry: Two different issues with childcare helped Ms. Frey develop her optimistic approach to conflicts about inclusion. Her mantra: "Assume positive intent."

During the six years she was at Philz Coffee, Ms. Frey was raising her two small children, but the rest of the executive team consisted of men with stay-at-home wives or men with no children. "No one was like me," she said. "All of the guys would say, 'Yep, we can do a daily call at 7 a.m.,' and my first reaction is, 'I need to figure out how to show up for that.' Like there's no option out."

Despite being early in her career, she spoke up.

"It took a lot of courage to say, 'Hey, I will do everything to make it work but if there's any flexibility, let me describe how my morning goes and how important and precious that time is.' And I was very pleased to see an adjustment of behavior."

That same issue came up – again – on a video call when the pandemic first hit.

“All of the guys were in the office together, pacing around during a 6:30 a.m. call and the two women were at home dealing with childcare,” she said. “It was a stark visual reminder of gender differences. The one beautiful thing about that moment is it was so uncomfortable for everyone involved that it gave us an invitation to have a conversation.”



Her takeaway is to confront those issues without an initial sense of anger or blame that could be polarizing.

“My advice is to assume positive intent, that they're just not aware. I've had moments where I've gone in swinging like, ‘This is discrimination!’ but it really changes the conversation when you start with the assumption that everyone wants to create a culture of belonging and wants each other to be successful.”

Don't start defeated: She continued: “I think it's easy for us as women to assume there are no options, or that the answer will be no. I've had to coach myself to avoid rushing to that conclusion until I've actually tried. The other thing I tell myself is that I want someone to bring that awareness to me if I'm ever creating that kind of situation.”

Don't look away: Finally, she emphasizes that leaders absolutely must advocate for people when they see instances of disrespect, anger or other micro-aggressions.

“As leaders, make sure we're stepping in and not turning the other way, because that's the only way change is going to happen.”

“One of our male leaders was really speaking down to a woman in leadership so I popped in and said, *‘Hey, I hear you but the way you're communicating is really inappropriate and uncomfortable. So, I suggest we put this conversation on hold and regroup.’* With some positive tone in the language, it's our responsibility to make sure we're not seeing something and not doing anything.”

- **It really IS a “Great” Resignation** You say, “Great resignation,” Carolyn Frey says, “Great opportunity!” Instead of panicking about losing workers, she says to focus on the opportunity to grab great new talent.
- “Just as we're losing people, we're acquiring amazing talent in the top of our funnel. If we're chasing people who are leaving, we're going to make the wrong decisions. Flip the paradigm to say, ‘What a great market to attract talent.’ ”



Returnships, bottlenecks, and listening sessions

Other Forum participants offered insights from their organizations about recruiting in the current tough environment, as well as building empathy by leaning in and reaching out.



Tap your workplace alumni network: Reaching out to former employees is one way to attract talent when there's so much competition – and it can help address the problem with retaining women in leadership.

SHRM data shows that many women have employment gaps due to caregiving reasons. Providing “returnship” programs can provide women with the opportunity to align their experience and knowledge more closely with the role. In the past six months, 22% of organizations say they've recruited caregivers with employment gaps.

Break the bottlenecks: Once you hear all those great ideas, they've got to be put into action or employees will stop speaking up. One organization created “situation rooms” to tackle anything that had to do with COVID first, and then with ideas about recruitment and retention. “We're tackling things very quickly and meet twice a week.”

Another Forum participant added: “With the pandemic, executive level people are communicating with people on a much more human level. There's huge opportunity to lean into our own vulnerability and engage in some of these conversations. And there are a number of leaders who just don't know what they don't know.”

Listen up: One organization holds listening sessions where employees can call in and share ideas around what may help them work better or help with self-care and well-being. The ideas include flexible start times, alternative schedules and help with mental health issues. The ideas are tagged as green, yellow, and red. Green ideas are put in place right away, yellow ideas may need support from HR or a supervisor, and red ideas get additional research and discussion.



Further resources

- From SHRM: [Surviving the Great Resignation Research Report](#)
- From SHRM: [Resignation Recovery Playbook](#)
- From SHRM: [Why are so Many Employees Quitting?](#)
- From SHRM: [Why Black Workers are Seeking New Opportunities](#)

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