A person with long hair

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When It’s Time to Leave

September 5, 2021 Well hello Friends! I hope you guys had an amazing week.

Today we’re going to talk about **When It’s Time to Leave.**

This episode was inspired by a phrase I keep seeing in the media. The Great Resignation.

This is the name that’s been given to the wave of mass resignations supposedly taking place inside companies across America.

And the typical explanation for this great resignation is the pandemic. We all know it’s upended our lives and careers and everyday norms. And the narrative out there says that because of this, people have started to rethink what’s important to them.

And supposedly, this trend is spanning all age ranges. Meaning it’s not JUST the younger generations like Millennials or Gen Z, who you might think would more naturally gravitate to big moves in a desire to continue to climb the ladder. It’s supposedly something the older worker – Gen X and the Baby Boomer – is doing as well.

Most of the articles I’ve read point to remote working policies as the culprit. And while I’m sure that’s it for at least some – maybe even most – of the people, it made me wonder…you know?

Is this “mass resignation” really just about remote working? Or is there more here?

Because while I’m sure there’s a lot of truth to remote working policies and maybe even vaccination policies as being a catalyst.

But I believe these two things are just skimming the surface of what’s really going on.

I believe this Great Resignation is a symptom of something much deeper, much more important, and much more PERMANENT than the pandemic. AND I think it’s about something that’s been shifting in our culture for a very long time.

So, what IS going on?

I believe the power dynamic between employee and employer is shifting. At a very rapid pace.

Further, I believe it’s been building for a decade or two.

And for me, this belief is rooted in a meeting I attended more than 20 years ago. Let me explain.

As I’ve said before on this podcast, my corporate career was spent as a brand marketer. And in brand marketing, we rely on data and insights to develop our promotional and creative strategies. So we’d watch general market and cultural trends and we’d field special studies, all to gain insight into how people think and what they care about.

So, when I saw the headline on the Great Resignation and I read a few dozen articles, I immediately thought of a meeting I attended about twenty years ago.

At the time, it was the year 2000. I was early in my career in brand strategy and I was working inside a wireless company just a few years after they launched their nationwide service. The meeting I was attending was a read out from a market trends study from Yankelovich, a market research firm.

It’s been too long for me to remember ALL the details of that study, but at a top level, it was talking about the “Age of Personalization.” And it said it would be coming about in the next twenty to thirty years, driven not only by a shift in the diversity of the population but also by the realization of the potential of the internet.

In 2001, we were still in the early days of the internet – way before the invention of social media – and everything from websites to online advertising was very 1.0. It seemed so cutting edge at the time, but it was very archaic when you compare it to today.

But what I remember so vividly from that meeting was the way they described what success for marketers and companies would look like in 2020 and 2030.

That it would no longer be a ‘one size fits all’ world.

That everything from clothing to TV content to food choices would be personalized.

That basically, our lives would become a very personalized ‘choose your own adventure.’ Or at least, that’s what I took away from that meeting.

And I remember that day so well because I recall thinking how difficult it was to even imagine what that would REALLY look like. Because in the late 90’s and early 2000’s, it was still kind of a one size fits all world.

I mean sure, we had cable TV and the internet, but it’s a long way from where it is today. Netflix and Google were only a few years old.

And while it’s not fully realized today, we’re SO much closer in 2020 to the vision Yankelovich painted.

If you just look at TV viewing habits, you can see the shifts.

In 2001, the massive hit show Friends (still one of my favorites) had an average viewership of more than 25 million people.

In 2020, the most popular show was NCIS, with an average viewership of 15 million.

I share this only to say that everything is shifting. We no long have the mass network TV audiences of old. Because we have so many choices – cable TV, You Tube, dozens of streaming services, Tik Tok, not to mention the distractions of social media that’s absorbed a lot of our free time. We can choose to watch ONLY those things that truly appeal to us.

This is happening with everything from food to clothing to fitness to you name it. People don’t buy their clothes at the mall from the national chain. They buy them online from specialty stores that appeal to them. Same thing with fitness. You don’t have to belong to the neighborhood gym. You can stream your own group fitness class right in your own home.

Everything is changing. Just like Yankelovich said it would.

And as a result, people’s expectation have changed. They no longer have to settle for what’s offered. They can find and demand the products, services and experiences they WANT.

And I believe this is playing out in the workplace as well.

Our parents may have thought the wisest choice was to adjust themselves to the work environment they were in so they could keep the ‘good, safe’ job.

But I think what we all learned in the 90’s, 00’s and 2010’s is that there is no ‘safe’ corporate job.

No matter how good or loyal you are, it can change at a moment’s notice. And we’ve had to accept the fact that we might be a good performer or deliver great results, but we can still lose our job if the company isn’t doing well, if our boss doesn’t like us, if there’s a pandemic.

And I think because of the changing expectations of people when it comes to wanting things that personally appeal to them along with this lack of safety and reliability that corporate has come to be, I think employees are aware they can make a different choice.

They’re more empowered to ask themselves an entirely different question than what maybe our parents or grandparents would’ve asked. And that question is, “Do I LIKE what I’m doing and WHO I’m doing it for?”

More and more, people care NOT ONLY about having interesting and lucrative work but about having work that FEELS good. Work that’s ALIGNED with who they are, what they care about and that honors the unique special skills, talents, and perspectives they bring to the table. And that extends to the culture, vibe and values of their workplace as well.

People TODAY are deciding they will no longer settle for a job that is less than FULLY ALIGNED with what matters to them.

So, I believe THAT’S what is really going on here. For the people that are part of the GREAT RESIGNATION, I believe Its about WAY MORE than wanting remote work. It’s about no longer being willing to compromise on the core things that matter to them. No matter what they might be.

Basically, I think it’s yet another way that Yankelovich trends prediction from two decades ago was right.

We’re seeing the Age of Personalization play out for work life.

The pandemic may have been the tipping point. It may have sped it up. But I believe we’ve been heading here for decades.

And now for a percentage of the working population, we’ve arrived.

But this GREAT RESIGNATION is just the beginning. It’s like the first wave. The early adopters. Because not everyone is THERE yet.

A good percentage of the working population is still willing to settle for less than everything they might want. For now. But I believe that’s going to change too, probably faster than anyone – certainly employers – might think.

And it should.

After all, according to a Gallup Survey on employee engagement, more than 64% of us are DISENGAGED in our jobs. That statistic is from 2020.

Just in case you think that’s a NEW thing, driven by all the crazy of last year, the number was 74% in 2000.

So, we’ve actually gotten a little better.

But still, that’s sad, don’t you think? That nearly 2/3 of us plod into work every day, NOT ENGAGED with either WHAT we do for a living or WHO we’re doing it for.

So, if that’s you, how can you know FOR SURE “when it’s time FOR YOU to leave?”

I wanted to give you five things to examine that could point to the need for you to make a change.

1. **It’s time to leave when you DREAD your workday.**

Do you live for Friday’s and hate Sunday nights? Let that recurring thought be a clue that you’re in a job that isn’t right for you. You might have a great boss and it might be a cool company that’s given you lots of opportunity. But if you dread going to work every day, something is wrong. Instead of beating yourself up, be curious about it. Are you frustrated about the culture? The bureaucracy? The political infighting? Ask yourself some questions and work to uncover WHY you feel the way you do. Every job, company and boss isn’t for EVERY body. And I can promise…if the one you have isn’t working for you, there’s another one that WILL. But before you jump ship, understand what’s driving your discontent.

1. **It’s time to leave when you’re going through the motions.**

Are you bored most of the time? Do you only half pay attention? Do you just go through the motions and do what’s asked of you? That’s not a good recipe for growth or fulfillment. If you don’t feel energized or passionate about your work, it’s time to take a look at why. And depending on your answer, it might be time for something new. A new company. A next level opportunity. A new career path. A shift to entrepreneur. Take some time to get underneath the boredom so you choose the RIGHT next step.

1. **It’s time to leave when you feel unseen, disrespected, or not valued.**

This goes without saying, but there’s no room for disrespect in the workplace. That includes bullying, discrimination, manipulation, toxicity, throwing people under the bus, making people look bad. And the list goes on. If this is happening in your work group or company – and we all know there are some employers where this is just the way it is -- it’s time to find a place that’s more evolved. Yes, better companies and bosses are out there. There are amazing places to work and amazing people to work for. You don’t have to settle for old school, disrespectful treatment from an employer who’s stuck in the way things used to be.

1. **It’s time to leave when you don’t feel aligned with the company’s values or workplace culture.**

Make sure you’re working in a place you feel aligned with. Does the company have values that are aligned with you? Do they live them or just talk about them? If something doesn’t “feel right”, it’s probably not right for you. That doesn’t mean it’s a bad place. It just means it’s not YOUR place. But I can promise, there are many others, that would be. And you can get out there and find them.

1. **It’s time to leave when you’re ready for more opportunity than your organization will give you.**

Sometimes we just know we’re ready for more. As a highly ambitious person myself, I can relate to this one. But in some companies, there’s a ‘set timetable’ that’s on a different time clock than you’d prefer. Guess what…you don’t have to settle for that if you don’t want to. You can of course and there’s nothing wrong with that. But if your ambition is in overdrive and if you’ve skilled up, aced all the stretch assignments and are chomping at the bit to prove your worth at the next level, maybe it’s time to find a place that’ll let you do that. RIGHT NOW. It’s at least something you should consider.

In past decades, people endured these things.

We were conditioned that we had to ‘pay our dues’ and ‘play by the rules’ and that someday, if we did everything just right, we MIGHT eventually get what we want.

But thanks to **The Age of Personalization**, I believe we’re witnessing the beginning of the end of those days. We’re seeing a rebalancing of the scales between employer and employee.

And I truly believe that’s a good thing, for both companies AND employees.

After all, if you’re a CEO, why should you accept that 64% (on average) of your current employee base is DISengaged?

You shouldn’t.

What do you think that would do to your bottom line?

To employee turnover?

To corporate reputation?

To stock price?

Not good, right?

But my question to those CEO’s is…do you know WHY 64% of your current employee base is DISENGAGED?

And no…it’s not just that your employees are ungrateful and lazy.

If this disengagement number applies to your organization, something systemic is wrong. But it doesn’t have to stay broken. You can fix it if you want. But it’s going to take effort. Breaking up political power structures that hold people back. And fixing whatever is going wrong in your org as the culture, leadership or people development level.

And my question for employees is…what are you willing to accept in terms of how you FEEL every day in your job?

Examine that. And start making some decisions.

I believe it’s important for both employee and employer to SEE these shifts and to accept them as permanent truths.

We’re not going back to the way things used to be. This isn’t a pandemic thing.

The diversity of the workforce is changing. That’s good.

Employees have new expectations and they want new rules – like remote work or maybe even fractional work, where they can have a side hustle AND a full-time job. Let’s make that happen.

There are amazing, talented, gifted employee that come from every socio-economic background, not just from the top business schools. So how about giving some ambitious non-college grads or perhaps junior college grads a fighting chance instead of weeding them out through your applicant tracking systems?

Old school bureaucracies, politics, gamesmanship and the like are relics of the past. Like caveman era.

For employers that don’t change, you’ll find yourself losing the war for top talent.

People aren’t going to put up with it anymore.

For me…I see this as an inflection point and an amazing one.

When I sat in that Yankelovich meeting two decades ago, I really couldn’t picture the world that study described. But it stayed with me.

And I know with certainty that we’re living in it now. Or the beginning of it anyway.

I see this as a time of huge opportunity.

So if you saw yourself in any of those five themes I shared earlier in this episode, I encourage you to get clear about exactly what you don’t like about where you are and to get equally clear about what you want. And then, go after it.

And, if you’re thinking that NOW might be the right time to make a change, I invite you to check out Resume Bootcamp, my online course that helps you showcase the very best of you. So that when you find the right opportunity, you’ve got a resume that’ll work hard for you.

Check it out at thepurposefulcareer.com/resume-bootcamp.

Until next time, make it a great week my friends.