



Commercial Insights with Regions Bank

Episode #15

How to Survive the Great Resignation

What really keeps employees loyal to a business in 2022. This episode explores everything from trends such as flexible work and evolving benefits packages to the very mindset that drives people to leave. Most important, it covers the practical foundation of success: your unique employee value proposition.

In this episode, we sit down with Ryan King, Head of Talent Acquisition at Regions Bank, to discuss what employers can do to survive the Great Resignation.

Episode Transcript

Ryan King, Head of Talent Acquisition, Regions Bank:

The contract between the employer and the worker is now being evaluated, and the pandemic is creating ripple effects that we'll feel for years to come.

Chris Blose, Host:

That's Ryan King, Head of Talent Acquisition for Regions Bank, describing the employer-employee relationship circa 2022.

Since 2020, businesses and the people who make them run have been through a lot: a pandemic, social and political changes, and, most recently, the headline-grabbing "great resignation" — a reported mass exodus of workers from their jobs.

Change is constant. So how does a company shore up its talent strategy to survive it — and make sure that its employer-employee relationship is as healthy and long-lasting as possible? Ryan King is here today to offer his perspective on the great resignation — and to discuss those ripple effects we'll all be feeling for years to come.

Chris:

Ryan, last time we spoke, the pandemic and digital acceleration were really changing the shape of work, and you were even very excited about reaching out to new demographics and opening up the hiring pipeline. How have things changed even further since we spoke?



Ryan:

For us at Regions, 2021 was the most productive year from a hiring perspective that we've ever had. Our talent acquisition team processed a record number of hiring transactions. The growth plans that were slowed or put on hold during 2020 came back to life very quickly in January of 2021. Our volume was also driven by a significant rise in turnover. So those two factors combined created a firestorm of recruiting activity.

Everything that I just mentioned was not just a phenomenon experienced by Regions. Companies throughout all industries across the country had a very similar year. So to simply answer your question, every company is or should be reevaluating their talent, acquisition and talent management strategies. I don't believe that we are just facing a short-term challenge here. I'm confident that the companies that explore talent strategy solutions for the long term are going to be the ones that succeed as we move forward.

Chris:

And obviously all of this is taking place in the context of something that's on the lips and minds of business leaders everywhere, which is the "great resignation." So what trends are you seeing out there? What does the landscape look like right now?

Ryan:

Let me start by just giving you a couple of really quick eye-opening statistics. Number one, the unemployment rate is back to its prepandemic level of 3.8%. It reached as high as 14.7% in April of 2020. Since January of 2020, we've lost roughly 1.8 million people from payrolls across the country. So let that sink in for a second. Roughly 10% of all available jobs are actually vacant. This is the highest level ever and it's growing. And lastly and probably most importantly, employee engagement across all industries is down roughly 15%.

I could go on and on with trends and statistics, but that's enough of the bad news. My point in telling you this is that the landscape for talent acquisition, talent management, and employee retention has changed and may forever be altered. The job market is on fire, the nature of work is evolving, and the psychology of job seekers has transitioned from that of discouragement to empowerment. Job openings are plentiful, workers are feeling more confident than ever to switch roles in search of better wages, career growth, and more flexible work.

Chris:

So it absolutely seems like a job seekers market right now. And with that in mind, from the HR perspective, how do you put the focus on the employee or the potential recruit?



Ryan:

It's a really complex question. But when you look at things like benefits and flexible work arrangements, team-building training, et cetera, you have to consider where we were prepandemic, where we went during the pandemic, where we are now in the present, and where we're heading in the future. Our demographics in the country are ever changing, governmental policies are fluid, technology is accelerating at mach speed.

The contract between the employer and the worker is now being evaluated, and the pandemic is creating ripple effects that we'll feel for years to come. So my belief is that when you package up all these issues and attempt to strategize on a solution, you're left with one question to answer. That one question is, what is your employee value proposition? That proposition should take all of those components mentioned above into consideration. And the output becomes your all-inclusive talent strategy moving forward.

Chris:

And is an employee value proposition new to a lot of companies? Is that something that has traditionally been a part of strategizing in the past?

Ryan:

The employee value proposition is not new in terms of talent acquisition and talent management, but it is something that is evolving. Most companies historically have just allowed their EVP or employee value proposition to happen naturally or organically. But as society has changed and as trends have changed and all of these external factors that I mentioned earlier have started to impact companies' abilities to attract talent, we've all had to be more mindful of what that EVP looks like.

Chris:

What are some best practices for getting to that EVP? You know, how do you determine when you look at your company's offerings, what is going to stand out?

Ryan:

The importance is really understanding what your employee value proposition is. So if you don't have one or don't know what that is, you know, my suggestion to you is to create a team of really high performing individuals across your company, not just individuals that work in human resources. Create a cross-functional team to work on the project.

If you're not partnering with your marketing team, your communications team, and other aspects of your HR department, then working together with those groups will help to create a highly functioning employee value proposition.



Chris:

I could imagine how the employee value proposition is especially valuable for recruiting, right? But have efforts at retention kept up as well? How can this expand to keeping really talented people in place once you've already found them?

Ryan:

It is really important to focus on developing a culture of skills development and employee experience. Today's jobs are changing both internally within the four walls of your company and externally with your competitors. So creating a culture of learning and development that will allow your employees skill sets to evolve internally instead of forcing these same associates to leave you to find that opportunity elsewhere. As far as employee experience is concerned, more companies went above and beyond for their employees during the height of the pandemic in 2020. Companies cannot revert back to their old pre pandemic ways and forget that the pandemic ever happened. Take care of your employees because they are your greatest asset.

Chris:

I'm curious, with those employees, what are some of the shifts in mindset that we're seeing?

Ryan:

Well, the number one thing is companies now are allowing new associates, new employees to work remotely. Companies are offering flexible hours. Companies are offering benefit packages that are really considered outside the box. And, you know, those offerings are not available to every company and in every industry. So it's really important that you strategize and offer what you can to remain competitive. And those things that you can't offer, you make sure that you are creating a culture of learning and development, as I mentioned before, to offset the lack of those offerings.

Chris:

The great resignation is a challenge, obviously, but are companies also seeing opportunities there? You mentioned the fact that in the past a lot of employees would see their path to advancement by moving from one company to another. So are there opportunities for smart recruiters to use their EVP to find those people?

Ryan:

For companies out there that are experiencing success with their recruiting and retention efforts, I say, congratulations. Keep doing what you're doing, keep looking forward and evolving, do not look in the rearview mirror because that is only going to stress you out even more. Stay proactive and operate with an agile mindset realizing that externally things will certainly continue to evolve. Make sure you are flexible enough with your talent strategies to be able to adapt to those changes. The greatest opportunity for those companies that are struggling is to tell your story — something Regions has invested in heavily over the past 24 months.



Use that storytelling in your pitch, sell your company as a great place to work, and tell the reasons why that's true. For example, here at Regions, as I mentioned earlier, we've leveraged our marketing and communications, and other HR teams to help develop and tell that story. We started with our employee value process position in mind, and it evolved and will continue to do so. Your proposition doesn't need to be perfect. Actually, it won't be perfect. So you have to be flexible, know that your proposition will change. But when you have a great story, tell that story. And tell it loud and proud because external applicants love to hear it.

Chris:

For a company that can't tout remote work, for example, or that kind of flexibility as a part of their EVP, what are other things that you can offer?

Ryan:

It's a great question. We hear all the time if you're watching the news or if you're listening to the labor statistics, information that comes out on the first Friday of every month, it's all about remote work and flexible work. It's almost like that's the only thing that is gonna get us through these next couple years. But the reality is not every job and not every company is suitable for remote work. I think it's very important that if you are one of those companies that can't offer remote working, that you review other hiring strategies to remain competitive.

As I mentioned earlier, ensure you're offering competitive benefits, allow for flexible hours, invest in technology that will allow for your employees to at least access work from home, not all the time, but every once in a while. Make sure you're keeping the employee at the center of every decision you make. Again, I'll ask the question, how do you define your employee value proposition? Because this question really resonates with that topic.

Chris:

And now on the flip side, for those who can offer that sort of remote hiring and have really expanded their geography, what best practices are out there for onboarding that talent? And not just initial onboarding, but really getting people culturally involved and making them feel like a part of the company to improve that retention rate.

Ryan:

The biggest lesson we learned is how important it is to have a plan. It sounds really simple, but it's very, very critical. No one, including Regions, had a plan at the start of the pandemic, but every company had to very quickly adapt. Our strategy evolved over the last two years, and it's continuing to evolve. We now know that if we ever have a similar challenge again, just how very important it is to have a strategic



direction and roadmap and make sure everyone has a role and knows exactly how to execute it. Revisiting that plan, the first three months of the pandemic our talent acquisition team adjusted the plan once a week.

Later, we started adjusting our plan monthly. Six months in, we had some really solid metrics, solid experiences, both good and bad, that we could look back upon to make some decisions. Those metrics and conversations have and continue to evolve and will help propel us as we move forward into the future.

Chris:

So how much does company culture matter in all of this. It seems like it plays a part in a lot of what you've mentioned today.

Ryan:

Culture matters greatly. You know, culture is often referred to as, quote unquote, "the way things are done around here," but you really have to be more specific than that. The best companies recognize great culture focuses on three things: behaviors, systems, and practices. These three things are all guided by a set of values — hence the employee value proposition. For instance, two years ago, things like ESG might not have impacted a company's ability to recruit positively or negatively, but now it's a big deal for many. You cannot look at your employee value proposition as just your work from home strategy or your flexible work process. Your EVP is also your culture of conducting business.

Chris:

So what do you see coming down the pipe in the next couple of years, both in terms of the great resignation and just general trends in terms of hiring and retention efforts?

Ryan:

Chris, I say this very hesitantly with all fingers and toes crossed. But things do seem to be calming down. I think turnover across the board has flattened and has even gone down slightly, which tells me that the massive influx of external talent into our organization and other organizations is settling in and getting comfortable in their new job.

All signs indicate that we may have plateaued from a COVID perspective. So as companies officially institute their return-to-office plans, I believe we'll see more normal voluntary turnover statistics take shape and take hold in the future. We at Regions are hoping for normalcy in 2022 in terms of talent acquisition. But if we've learned anything over the past 24 months, it's that it's impossible to predict the future.



Chris:

You can't predict the future — but you can and should plan for it. Then be prepared to revisit that plan when change inevitably happens.

But focus first and foremost on your employee value proposition. If you can define what makes your company unique and appealing to your market of prospective employees, you'll have a core story for the rest of your policies and practices to evolve around.

Thanks to Ryan King for joining us today and offering this insight, and thank you for listening. Get related resources for your business and listen to future episodes at regions.com/commercialpodcast. And subscribe to this podcast on your favorite podcast service.

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