The Year of the Employee - A revised employee value proposition

By Unati Moalusi , issued by Wunderman Thompson

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The impact of the Covid pandemic on employee wellbeing will long be felt, but as the world heads towards recovery, it's important to understand the change in the employee psyche. Unati Moalusi, chief people officer at Wunderman Thompson SA, describes her top three psychological elements that have impacted organisations and their people.

Isolation and loneliness

The world over, employees' mental health continues to be impacted by the global pandemic. The lockdowns and quarantining or self-isolation are, for many people, exceptionally difficult, especially for those who regularly connected in boardrooms, grabbed coffee with colleagues, and chatted by the water coolers.



Unati Moalusi

In some, the immediate disconnect from the physical world to 'survive' has led to unidentified or unspoken depression.

Reflecting on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the first three levels, physiological, safety, and love/belonging, were hugely interrupted.

Our physiological safety was threatened by this airborne virus, forcing us into flight mode, and this need for safety found us wanting. Emotional security, financial security, freedom from fear, social stability, health, and wellbeing all form part of the need for safety in Maslow's hierarchy. People want to experience order, predictability, and control in their lives, and it's safe to say so much of this was compromised/impacted significantly for many. Interpersonal relationships and a sense of affiliation became a challenge. The isolation of the lockdown reduced our sense of belonging to a broader community.

Death and multiple loss

Many people lost relatives, friends, and colleagues to Covid, bringing new meaning to life. People were forced to face threats and death in most extreme cases. This resulted in a desperate need to live. And not just live but live meaningfully. Many have questioned the hamster wheel they so willingly ran in the past and are looking for better ways to integrate their personal lives with their work. The loss of loved ones so suddenly also forced many people to re-evaluate personal values and ensure a life that incorporates family, loved ones and self-actualisation more so than before. The saying 'tomorrow is not guaranteed' has never been more real during the Covid pandemic.

The great resignation

This desire to embrace a more meaningful life led to what I would compare to a personal 360 review, where individuals take a close look at their lives and how they want to live going forward. This has contributed to what we know as The Great Resignation.

Whilst working from home, many were isolated, bringing them closer to their immediate families and even closer to themselves as there was very little escape. As a result of the traumatic and challenging time, employees are looking for more compassion and compassionate leadership.

Dubbing 2022 ‘The Year of the Employee’ emphasises the employee and forces leaders to consider the shift caused by the pandemic and the lens applied in handling the employee value proposition (EVP).

A new perspective

To counteract the incoming wave of employee turnover, organisations need to review and revise their EVP or Employee Engagement Models. This means actively seeking guidance and input from employees to ascertain what they still regard as relevant, re-engaging talent and collaborating for meaningful solutions on how to bring about the best value for success and listening with the intent to act.

People are faced with ambiguity and pressure to keep up with the changes in their personal and professional lives; therefore, organisations need leaders who demonstrate compassion. Compassion is empathy converted into action and understanding what a team needs to succeed and having the desire to help them succeed is a fundamental call to action. Compassionate leaders must assume good intentions and focus on behaviours and actions.

Key takeouts

1. Demonstrate a culture of active responsibility even when employees are out of sight (hence focusing on actions and behaviours).
2. Be open to a hybrid working environment between home and work; trust that employees will show up with good intentions. Employees have suddenly realised working from home can have its perks. Leisurewear, no traffic, saving costs on petrol, having the ability to see your children more often than before, etc.
3. Cultivate employee engagement with 100% effort, resulting in employees who perform better, experience less burnout, and have a longer commitment to their organisations.
4. Ascertain happiness levels more frequently; personal check-ins are critical – not a work status but a personal check-in.
5. Reassess staff support structures; for example, do staff still need petrol cards or do they need a subscription to a self-care or meditation platform?

When leaders encourage employees to bring their ‘whole self’ to work, it enables people to show up authentically. This statement is layered with so much hope and creates a culture of inclusion because it says everyone belongs. When employees connect what they do to what they care about (their passions, values, etc.), it facilitates responsible freedom – freedom to be themself, whilst taking responsibility for their role within the organisation.

This approach eliminates the work version versus the real version of employees. It integrates the two worlds, which immediately fosters authenticity. This nurtures happiness levels and, therefore, employee engagement, bringing a new sense of meaning to the world of work. Additionally, this notion demonstrates an inclusive culture – it says my personal needs are met!

Whist these ideas/perspectives are quite simple; they require a conscious effort to really make an impact where it matters most. Compassionate leaders can bring meaning to employees’ lives in a way that sustains their journey within organisations and fosters a longer-term commitment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Unati Mbalusi is chief people officer at Wunderman Thompson SA.

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