

Open the Door to Your Boomerang Staff

Corporate alumni networks are being put to good use by retaining links with today's transient workforce, finds **Mary-Anne Baldwin**,
Corporate Editor at Criticleye



We all know the importance of networking, which is why as individuals we often keep in touch with former colleagues. Yet bizarrely, many businesses don't do the same.

The growing transience of today's workforce makes the concept of a job for life increasingly archaic. Constantly on the lookout for opportunities to build skills and knowledge, employees – particularly millennials – are moving jobs and showing more flexibility in the roles they take.

Companies are similarly keen on portfolio working. According to EY's [research](#) into US companies, 56 per cent of organisations are using short term 'gig' workers to plug the skills gap in their workforce. Forty per cent expect to increase their use of contingent workers over the next five years. Similar changes are happening in the UK, Netherlands, Belgium, France and Australia, says EY.

Failure to stay in touch with members of this frequently changing workforce means businesses will lose talent to their rivals.

I was struck by the recent conversations I had with business leaders in Asia on how they're creating an alumni of staff. One CEO explained he had welcomed back 60 'boomerang employees' within the past few months – often with the added bonus of having learned new skills from the competition.

While it's a global business issue, it's particularly important in Asia, where competition has led to high staff turnover and the numerous family and founder-led companies aren't doing enough to train and promote new talent.

The US' contingent workforce has grown 66 per cent in the past 10 years
According to EY

Whether you're a CEO or Human Resources Director, this mobility requires an entirely new way of thinking about talent. We must view our staff as we do our customers, which means accepting that while they may be seduced by competitors, we can also lure them back with the requisite levels of brand loyalty.

The savviest HRDs will also tie the employee experience to that of the customer, creating consistency between the internal and external messages.

Build the Brand

There are plenty of reasons to stay engaged with alumni. They can build the brand, speak positively about the organisation and even encourage others to join, thereby allowing you to fish in a much larger and deeper talent pool. Alumni polls can also be a great way to get feedback from individuals who are often far more honest than those still in the organisation.

Just think about what happens when a business doesn't connect with its high-performers. At best, it says goodbye to talented people, at worst those

people unite and become a competitor – LinkedIn, Yammer and YouTube were all born of PayPal's alumni.

Some of the more obvious methods to stay in touch include social media, reunions and networking events – but the really vital ingredients are personal connection, familiarity and sincerity. Data and algorithms will help track your staff leavers, but it takes warmth and well-meaning to maintain a connection, and those sentiments won't mean anything if they weren't expressed while that person was working with you.

When recruitment costs as much as it does, why are HRDs letting this valuable resource go unlooked? It's not as though former colleagues don't want the service – indeed, they're probably already on one of the many thousands of alumni groups to be found on social media, most of which go unmonitored by the companies they represent. ■



Mary-Anne Baldwin
Editor
Corporate
Criticleye

Mary-Anne joined Criticleye in May 2015 as Corporate Editor. She is responsible for delivering informative editorial content that shares leadership insights on a range of topics, including business transformation, innovation and private equity.

She also chairs a number of Criticleye's events including our regular Global Conference Call discussions on a range of topics, such as M&A, IPOs, gender diversity, employee engagement and risk.

Contact Mary-Anne through:
www.criticleye.com