

Boomerang Employees: Why they're Good For Business



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Full transcript

Rob Parsons:

Welcome to PULSE, a Paychex HR Podcast, where HR professionals find insights on today's top issues and inspiration to build and lead effective teams in a healthier workplace. I'm your host Rob Parsons.

Rob Parsons:

Hi, everyone. Rob Parsons here. Welcome to PULSE. We're joined today by Jarryd Rutter. Jarryd has worked in the HR field for more than 20 years, and he currently works as an HR coach here at Paychex, collaborating and partnering with our HR business partners who are responsible for supporting our Paychex HR clients. So he is really in the field, on the front lines, and he knows what's going on.

Rob Parsons:

Jarryd has a bachelor's degree in business administration and human resources management from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. He's also PHR certified and SHRM-CP certified. Jarryd, welcome to the podcast.

Jarryd Rutter:

Thanks, Rob. Excited to be here.

Rob Parsons:

So we've had a few conversations leading up to this, and I think we landed on a really interesting topic, especially given all the news around the great resignation, all the stories about people leaving, hiring new people. But today, you and I are going to talk about boomerang employees.

Jarryd Rutter:

We are indeed. Yep. It's a hot topic out there right now.

Rob Parsons:

So tell me, why should a business want a boomerang employee? They left. Why would I want somebody to come back who's been here before and decided they wanted to exit?

Jarryd Rutter:

Yeah. Assuming it's the right person and assuming that the rehire is being done for the right reasons, there can be a lot of expense eliminated. You're not working through the recruiting process to the same degree in which you might otherwise, depending upon circumstance. Training that individual would be, in many situations, easier. So that piece is less expensive. And there's also typically going to be a faster speed to efficiency and independence.

Jarryd Rutter:

So when you factor all of these things in together and add to that yet bringing in someone that you theoretically know and they know your company, they know your culture, they know how things work, pile all that together, and a lot of times it can make for not only a smart business decision, but in many situations, those individuals tend to stay with the company longer after they leave and do come back. There's a sense of realization that the grass isn't necessarily always greener on the other side. And when those individuals come back, statistics do show that they oftentimes stick around longer.

Rob Parsons:

That's really interesting. I would think there's going to be a lot of onus on me as a leader, as a manager, as an HR professional to not take it personally when someone leaves and not burn those bridges, so to speak. Can you speak to that a little bit?

Jarryd Rutter:

Yeah. And that's really important. And emotions can play a role in burning those proverbial bridges. And particularly now, you mentioned the great resignation earlier, and with the great resignation, there is an added sense of frustration, so to say, when people do leave the organization. And there can be some bitterness. And trying to really temper any animosity and really control emotions is important, because it is important to think more long term and realize that there may be a scenario or a situation in which that person does in fact want to come back. And if it's someone that you would want to come back, handling that situation appropriately is potentially going to pay dividends down the road.

Jarryd Rutter:

So make sure it's a very, very smooth and comfortable off-boarding process. Make sure that the person feels valued on the way out. Let them know, "Hey, if things don't work out, you want to come back, let us know." And depending upon circumstance, and you'll hear me say that a lot, but it depends, depending upon circumstance, it may make sense to stay in touch with people after they leave, check in with them once a month, once a quarter, see how things are going, so that it is known that if they want to come back and if things aren't going to work out for them, the door is open, so to say.

Jarryd Rutter:

And there are certain compliance situations that would need to be considered along with that. But that's another conversation for another day. We don't need to get into that right now.

Rob Parsons:

That's always the sticky wicket. That's a whole podcast series in and of itself.

Jarryd Rutter:

Yeah. No. And it's important to consider, too, that there are a variety of different reasons as to why someone might leave, right? Maybe they are in fact leaving for what they perceive as being a better opportunity, right? Whether it's better pay, whether it's better benefits, different job altogether, they want to try something new. They may have a family responsibility that they need to address. We saw a lot of that during particularly the early

part of the pandemic and people that couldn't work because they had childcare responsibilities or elder care responsibilities. Some people want to go back to school. Sometimes it's seasonal.

Jarryd Rutter:

Where there needs to be maybe a little bit more caution is if it's someone that was involuntarily terminated, and those circumstances may lead to a scenario in which it doesn't make a lot of sense to bring that person back. But arguably, there could even be scenarios in which it could work out, if there's been a change to a position or a new position, something has significantly changed that would allow someone to come back and perhaps work in maybe a slightly different capacity, or maybe they've obtained an additional skillset while away from the organization. So...

Rob Parsons:

That's interesting. I had not considered those who were involuntarily terminated. But I've lived through economic times where there were layoffs, when businesses just dumped the workforce because they couldn't afford them and then really hoping to get them back. Are there things I can do from a policy standpoint that can help encourage somebody to think about returning, sweeten the pot, so to speak?

Jarryd Rutter:

Yes. And when we say involuntarily terminated in the context of what I was describing, I should clarify. I wasn't necessarily referring to a reduction in force type of situations, in which business necessity required the employer to cut ties with an employee. I was referring more to a scenario in which maybe someone was having performance or behavioral issues and they were involuntarily terminated-

Rob Parsons:

Got it.

Jarryd Rutter:

... because of those reasons. As far as proactive steps that can be taken, there are a few. Our HR business partners do work with our clients to ensure that employers are at least thinking about these types of things and including policies within a handbook, for example, that would address something such as, if you leave the company and you're gone for X number of days and you return, you do or do not need to complete a new introductory period, right? That's something that employers a lot of times don't think about. And there can to a degree be a sense of, "Eh, I'll burn that bridge if and when I get there." But it should be something that employers are considering, because it's inevitable. It's probably going to happen at some point.

Jarryd Rutter:

And that number is going up as far as a number of people that are leaving and are coming back. I want to say it's up a solid 15 to 20% just over the course of the past couple of years. But policies in the handbook addressing what's going to happen with PTO when you come back. Are you going to have to start from scratch? Do you get some of it back? That can, in some states, be dictated by state law or local law. So that's a consideration that would need to be factored in.

Jarryd Rutter:

We're seeing a lot of work from home scenarios. So this is another area where an employer may need to consider, if an employer has their work from home option based on tenure or based on the number of years that an employee has been with the company, they may want to consider, "Okay, well, what happens if someone leaves and then they come back? Do we use that original hire date and make the determination on tenure based off of that original hire date? Do they use the new hire date?"

Jarryd Rutter:

So these are all things that are more, I would say, administrative in nature to a degree, but there are things that oftentimes aren't considered. And then suddenly, you have someone come back and the employer's trying to figure out, they pick up the phone, call their HR VP and say, "Well, what do we do?" And then it's a completely different set of considerations when making that analysis.

Jarryd Rutter:

So those are really a lot of the things that we would look at proactively. The other piece would, of course, be exit interviews, trying to identify why someone is leaving. Is there anything that can be done to retain them on the way out? Well, maybe, maybe not. But if they can't be retained, you at least have some greater indication as to why they're leaving in the first place, so that if things do change or if there is a change of heart by the exiting employee, the employer has a little bit more to work with as far as knowledge of the situation.

Rob Parsons:

I love that idea of being proactive about it. I think handbooks is one of the things we tend to get neglectful about, and we set it and forget it and let the policies be. And we're living in a very different world than we lived in a few years ago. And it makes sense to look at the total package of how we're managing that workforce. So I really love that idea. And I thought it was interesting what you said about exit interviews, too, because we always hear about that. But something I'm starting to hear about more is stay interviews and this idea that maybe I should find out what's going on before people leave.

Jarryd Rutter:

Yep. Absolutely. So whether it's a stay interview, which would traditionally be more of a one-on-one type of conversation, or employers are starting to collect a lot of voice of employee data. And that's going to give, in a lot of situations, more of an aggregate feel for what's going on.

Jarryd Rutter:

But with the stay interview, it gives the employer the opportunity to try to get out ahead of things and proactively retain people. But similar to an exit interview, should someone leave anyways, you have something to work with with regards to, "Okay, what was going on with this specific individual?" But it also allows for an employer to try to identify trends, right?

Jarryd Rutter:

Maybe some of the feedback that's obtained through a stay interview is that there's concern over the benefits plan, or maybe there's concern over, I don't know, management's ability to consistently enforce policy and expectations differ from employee to employee. The employer now knows that. They have a better idea of what's going on. Again, that allows them to make a better workplace currently for the existing employees. But there as well, if there's information that comes up, even if there's someone that's no longer with the organization and there's significant change made within the organization, it may allow for that information to be used to bring somebody back or recruit people that have left previously.

Rob Parsons:

And it's a good point. You've got to listen. You can't just do this because you're supposed to. You've got to respond. At least at some level, you as an employer need to make some changes. This isn't just window dressing.

Jarryd Rutter:

Yeah. And I mentioned earlier that this is a hot topic and it's going to continue to be. Everyone is hyper focused on the great resignation, the war on talent. And I saw a very interesting stat this morning that 21% of people have looked for or have moved jobs. One-fifth of Americans have changed jobs over the course of the preceding 12 months. Of those individuals, I want to say it was 37, 40%, somewhere in there, are already looking for a different job. And a lot of them indicated that they left for a higher pay and found out, when they got that higher pay, that there are a lot of other things that came along with that higher pay that they're maybe not really feeling, right? Culture goes a long, long way. Management, a company's ability to influence and to lead goes a long, long way.

Jarryd Rutter:

If you're making an extra \$15,000, \$20,000 a year, while that's a sizable chunk of change, I don't want to try to pretend that it's not, but you're going someplace else and you're miserable, well, some people might make the determination that, "This isn't for me" and look elsewhere.

Jarryd Rutter:

But I found that to be very, very interesting. We're seeing a lot of movement. We're seeing a lot of people leave jobs and turning around relatively quickly and looking for something else. And if that something else could be the employer that they left in the first place, again, as mentioned earlier, there's benefits, can be benefits to having those people come back.

Rob Parsons:

Love it, Jarryd. This was a great conversation. You've got so much information. Are there any last thoughts you'd like to share with the audience about this whole phenomenon of boomerang employees and how to really, not make it work for you, but be proactive and be prepared?

Jarryd Rutter:

Yeah. In conclusion, I guess I would say, to your point earlier, don't burn bridges. Terminations, or resignations, I should say, can be emotional. Think long term and think that there may be benefit in bringing somebody back if they're interested in coming back. And think long term from the perspective of do as many things proactively so that you're prepared if and when that time does come, whether it's policies, whether it's gathering information, whether it's keeping in touch with people. It saves money. It saves time. It's better for a company overall. It's just got to be the right situation and the right person. But we're going to see more of it. I can promise you that.

Rob Parsons:

Love it, Jarryd. Thank you so much for joining the podcast today.

Jarryd Rutter:

Yeah. Thanks for having me, Rob. Again, I appreciate it.

Rob Parsons:

And thank you to our listeners. We'd love to hear you tell us what you want from this podcast. So go ahead and visit [PayX.me Pulse Topics](https://payx.me/pulse-topics) to submit guest and topic ideas. That's P-A-Y-X dot M-E slash Pulse Topics. Thank you, all, and please stay happy and healthy.

Announcer:

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