

# Is culture the antidote to the Great Resignation?

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In the years following the Covid-19 pandemic, the so-called 'Great Resignation' saw a rise in job-quitting across many parts of the world - and, despite its high unemployment rate, South Africa was not exempt from this wave of resignations.



Caroline Sewell, head of People and Culture at Tractor Media Holdings

At the end of 2021, Old Mutual's reward management platform Remchannel revealed that employee turnover had increased by 16% across all categories, while just under 69% of Remchannel's remuneration survey respondents indicated that they were battling to attract new employees or retain their existing talent. Moreover, data from HR consultancy 21st Century revealed that a huge proportion of resignations (almost 40%) contributed to the total sum of staff turnover in 2021.

But the good news is that a healthy company culture could be the antidote to the loss of talent. "After the relative flexibility that work from home (WFH) afforded, some companies found that when they reverted to normal office hours, there were employees who quit their jobs," says Caroline Sewell, head of People and Culture at Tractor Media Holdings.

She adds that while companies cannot simply continue to allow permanent WFH across the board for myriad reasons, there are other

ways to create similar flexibility and help staff achieve a healthy work-life balance that could prevent a high employee churn.

With Tractor having one of the lowest resignation rates across the media industry (approximately 2.5% a year for the past few years, or one person out of every 40), Sewell weighs in on what makes for happy, empowered employees.

## Why do you think South Africa has seen similar signs of the Great Resignation taking place here?

Two factors are catalysing this trend – the first being financial, and the second being a shift in how we are prioritising our work-life balance.

Many people were adversely affected by the impact that Covid had on the economy and resigned in an effort to seek a new role that might offer more financial security. The pandemic also caused many people to re-evaluate their priorities and make fundamental changes to their lives, such as striving for a better work-life balance or spending more time with loved ones. Almost polar opposites, but with the same result.

## Why is culture so important and what makes for a healthy culture?

A positive culture results in more engaged, motivated employees; a high standard of work and good productivity; satisfied clients; and low staff turnover. This, in turn, results in lower business costs and the potential for higher profitability.

At Tractor, we have several pillars around which we build our culture.

Our Staff Development programme sees us actively encouraging both the personal and career-related growth of individuals. We also incorporate various team building activations that offer an opportunity to connect while reinvigorating the body and the soul.

We also view internal communications as vital; information sharing is critical as it allows for a more seamless flow of work while empowering employees, who feel that they are kept in the loop.

Well-defined key performance indicators (KPIs) and regular/monthly check-ins between our management team and their direct reports facilitate the pathway to excellence.

Finally, encouraging participation in community outreach initiatives fosters a culture of giving back and a sense of purpose in our employees.



### What makes the culture at Tractor so special?

We're currently hiring a range of new staff and the candidates we meet have been vocal about their positive perception of the company's culture. We also have several 'boomerang' employees, who have returned to work at Tractor after leaving to work elsewhere.

Our culture (which includes opportunities for individual growth, team building social events, the explicit promotion of good work-life balance, and a focus on mental well-being) is well-known across the industry, as well as evident to those visiting us for the first time.

It's not a manufactured creation; it's a manifestation of how the individuals who lead Tractor genuinely feel about people. It's real and personal, and results in an openness across the board.

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