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Study: Nearly One-third of Workers Going Back to Previous Employers

Spherion study finds growing acceptance for “boomerang employees” in American workplaces

ATLANTA – April 5, 2016 — Workers planning a dramatic exit from their job may want to think twice about burning bridges with their employer. According to the latest WorkSphere survey from national staffing company Spherion, and conducted online in March 2016 by Research Now™ among more than 1,000 full- and part-time workers, nearly one-third (29 percent) of American workers have returned to a previous employer after leaving for some time. An additional 41 percent said they are open to being a “boomerang” employee and potentially making such a return.

Why are so many workers open to the idea of returning to a company they once left? Other than salary, the feeling of being wanted tops this list. Sixteen percent of workers said they would consider going back to a previous employer if a former manager or colleague expressed interest in having them do so. An equal number indicated that they never wanted to leave their previous company in the first place, with non-work factors necessitating the move.

While employer-driven interest has fueled much of the rise in boomerang employees, many workers are proactively building their own path back to a former company. More than half (55 percent) of workers believe it is their responsibility to initiate conversation about making a return, versus only 28 percent who believe a previous colleague should reach out to them.

Despite growing acceptance for the boomerang concept across the workforce, some employees prefer that old doors remain permanently closed. More than one in three (35 percent) workers would not consider going back, feeling that such a move would either be a step back in their career (27 percent) or the company culture was not the right fit the first time (19 percent).

“Because the boomerang concept is growing in popularity as a job-seeking strategy and accepted by a majority of American workers, both employees and employers should be rethinking their approach to each phase of the employment life cycle,” said Spherion Division President Sandy Mazur. “For example, employees should carefully manage their exit in case they want to return down the road, and employers should cast their recruitment net wider to include those who may be looking to come back.”

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The boomerang concept has important implications for employers’ recruitment and hiring strategies. In fact, 36 percent of employees say they are more likely to work for a company that accepts boomerang

employees. Perhaps looking ahead to their own future decisions, nearly half (47 percent) believe ex-employees should have to participate in a less rigorous hiring process than new candidates. Additionally, 35 percent of workers believe previous employees should get credit for “previous time clocked” at a former job when they are evaluated for tenure-based benefits.

The Spherion WorkSphere survey found several other interesting trends surrounding how companies and workers approach the idea of being, or working with, boomerang employees:

Incentives Impact Return Receptiveness

- Of those who said they could be influenced to return to a former employer, the top two reasons would be for a more flexible schedule than they currently have (22 percent) and for the opportunity to work in a position uniquely created for them (17 percent).
- One-in-five millennial (18-34) females would want a higher title than they currently have if they were to return to a former company.

Most Don't Sweat “that Awkward Moment”

- Forty-five percent of workers would not feel awkward returning to a previous employer.
- More millennials (46 percent) than any other generation said they would feel awkward returning, compared with less than 33 percent of workers in older age demographics.
- More millennial males (59 percent) than females (42 percent) would feel awkward returning as a boomerang employee.

Employees Concerned about Boomerang Favoritism?

- One-in-five employees (18 percent) believe their employer targets potential boomerangers for rehire over new candidates.
- The top reason employees think employers seek out potential boomerangers is to save money on recruiting and training new employees (37 percent).
- Thirty-six percent of employees said they believe their company’s familiarity with past employees’ abilities is why they rehire people who have previously worked there.

About Spherion

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