

HOLD ON TIGHT AND DON'T LET GO

Alex Bell explores how companies across the South West are trying to boost staff retention in the midst of the 'great resignation'

First comes the great resignation, then the great reshuffle and finally the great retention. If only it was this simple.

For companies across the South West that are intent on reaching this third and final destination of successful retention in a heated jobs market, significant and layered challenges remain.

Offering better perks, including work-life balance and pay, while integrating enhanced career professional development programmes, is surely a must. And pushing productivity to optimum levels while still ensuring workers are well is the golden ticket.

From the outside looking in, this reshuffling is fascinating. But what's it like on the inside for companies trying to do their best by their staff? When do company leaders make changes to their approach and how? And are they being made because the best workers have already walked away?

Gaining perspective

James Ray is chief executive of Bristol-based CRM agency Armadillo, which has overseen a 47 per cent turnover growth in the past few years while boosting headcount by about a third to 75 people.

The secret to Armadillo's growth and talent journey? There isn't one, as such, says Ray, but he did decide to take the listen-and-learn route.

"For some time now," he says, "we've been without a proper office. But that has given us an opportunity to listen and learn about what's going on in the world.

"We kind of sat back to some extent when it all started and saw some big mistakes that were happening, and some good things, too."

Armadillo and its staff are poised to secure and move into a large office in central Bristol before the end of the year.

"What motivates people most is wanting to do a good job," says Ray. "So we are



HOW LOOM DIGITAL APPROACHES CULTURE & RECRUITMENT

■ **NICOLA ELLISON, FOUNDER OF BRISTOL MARKETING COMPANY LOOM DIGITAL, SPEAKS TO INSIDER**

What is your company's culture and values? Loom Digital is a people-first business. We strive to do our best at all times: we're curious and always learning.

How does this help you attract and retain talent? Our team has been the champion for hiring. Our people have tapped into their existing network for new suitable recruits. We also recruit for team fit and attitude first. This helps nurture close bonds within the team which in turn helps with retention.

Forty-three per cent of the team have been with us for over five years, which is good for a sector that typically has high churn. New starters always comment on how open and supportive everyone is.

What incentives do you have to retain employees? This year, we've revisited our employee benefits package to give more flexibility and choice. We have also started offering enhanced maternity and paternity leave policies and optical cover. Our People and Culture Lead looks after team wellbeing and is continually looking for new initiatives. Other incen-

tives include early Friday finish, summer 4.5-day working week, extra holiday for each year of service, never work your birthday, 1-2-1 coaching via More Happi, charity days, socials, an extended Xmas break and unpaid sabbaticals.

Learning and development is focused around personal development plans, mentorship programmes, coaching and a training budget per person.

Is hybrid working playing a part in day-to-day operations? Team members can choose to work from home or from the office. We encourage collaborative work days between service pods. For example, we have a biddable media day every Wednesday where team members are encouraged to work from the office.

Do you believe the 'great retention' can follow the 'great resignation'? Why? I do hope the 'great retention' is next for employers and employees. Next year is going to be tough for many businesses and for people personally as the cost of living crisis deepens. Businesses will need their trusted, loyal employees to pull together more than ever. In return, businesses must reward them with job security and better remuneration.

Retention & incentives

PEOPLE



The team at Armadillo

going to make the space awesome for collaboration. But we are shooting for the best possible balance, so will continue with our commitment to ensure the home-working setup is as good as it can be for the different work carried out there."

A learning culture

Evidence from the big-four accountancy firm Deloitte illustrates this key factor that is crucial to the bottom line of many – a learning culture.

Those walking the walk are 52 per cent more productive than their peers, 17 per cent more profitable and are 92 per cent more likely to develop novel products and processes, according to Deloitte's research.

And, critically, their retention rates are also a third to a half higher.

Across the pond, data from California-based management consultancy Blue Beyond Consulting revealed 80 per cent of US and Canadian workers surveyed stated

the importance of company values aligning with their own. This is a related factor that matters to staff and the likelihood of their committing.

Bristol-based The BD Consultancy employs Caitlin Roxburgh as head of ESG. She supports client companies with their journeys towards looking after staff.

She says: "We are looking at ways that we can align ourselves better with people's values. It is growing in importance."

Roxburgh is a 'listening' advocate also.

SUPPORTING STAFF TO GROW

■ IAN HALLIWELL, SALES AND MARKETING DIRECTOR OF BRISTOL'S XLEDGER, TALKS ABOUT SUPPORTING TALENT

Corporate giant Xledger provides software that helps more than 10,000 organisations in over 60 countries to digitise, streamline and bring automation to their finances.

How does the digital technology company look after its own and nurture collective harmony and loyalty?

Businesses can put in place as many employee incentive programmes as they like, but to push towards great retention, giving team members hollow quarterly perks isn't going to cut it.

Businesses need to create great places to work, where employees feel like they're part of something, where they're professionally progressing, and where if things get tough or they need some assistance there is a set of robust protocols in place that will come to their aid.

Culture and wellbeing sit at the forefront of our ethos, with senior management and our leadership placing a huge focus on wellbeing and productivity.

We support this with things like flexible working structures, built around a core hours base. This allows us to accommodate family-life requirements, which is a huge retention driver. We also put a great amount of investment into training and development. It means we are working hard to ensure that the business is a long-term professional home rather than just a stop-gap.

Where does health and wellbeing sit in Xledger's mandate to staff? Wellbeing is a major focus. We keep tabs on this with our 15Five performance-manager platform.

What's that? Any staff who record 3/5 or below on their 15Five reports that they periodically tackle will have a one-to-one meeting with their manager to go over any concerns, troubles or issues

they may be experiencing. This duty of care is ingrained into the Xledger culture. We want staff to feel connected to the organisation, to achieve their goals and come to work feeling like they are connected to a positive, friendly network of peers.

We also have our office space. We want the Xledger office to be a 'destination' in its own right. Yes, it's a place of work, but there's plenty of fun to be had and we've invested heavily in its design, layout and features.

We've also implemented a community-based approach. This includes giving all team members two charity days a year to support a cause of their choosing in the region. In addition, through our work with Bear In Mind, which is a Bristol Bears Community Foundation initiative aimed at empowering teenage girls from disadvantaged backgrounds with workshops and mentorship, we aim to foster the mindset that working at Xledger is more than a corporate nine-to-five.

"Asking people and listening to people about what they actually want," she says, "rather than just throwing generic benefits at them that you think people might want and need is the best way."

"Some team members will prefer having policies in place for anti-corruption, bribery, while others will prefer a free gym membership."

She adds: "Internally we are also trying to be as authentic and open as possible. Through listening we now have a collective commitment to sustainability. Glass-bottle milk deliveries, plastic-negative products, office plants, recycling and moving away from a reliance on data storage. There are cash prizes each month for sustainability ideas as well."

A gripe of Roxburgh's is organisations saying they do certain things but not necessarily going through with them.

"Training is another huge area that a lot of people really want, especially more junior team members, which I don't think a lot of places are offering at the moment – certainly not to the extent that people want."

"None of this should be a tick-box exercise."

On the 'great resignation'

Back at Armadillo, benefits include ongoing access to career coaching sessions with a renowned external coach, quarterly performance reviews, lunches with the directors and anonymous staff satisfaction surveys.

Ray also has his own definition of the great resignation.

"We've not seen a great resignation in terms of lots of people who used to be in our industry exiting it," he says. "The main impact on us has been second-hand and impacted by what's happening in other industries."

"On a macroeconomic level, I think it has been people in the latter stages of their careers who have decided to leave due to a change in perception about their lives and how to live. And that has impacted a bunch of industries that have then started having to look more widely in terms of where they draw their talent from to replace an increased level of churn."

"So for us that means that the area where we compete for talent has broadened. There are more companies out there looking for talent that might also be a fit for Armadillo." ■