



# The Great Reengagement: How Chemical Companies can Build a Positive and Safe Employee Culture

In the wake of the "Great Resignation," a strong employee culture is important.

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The chemical industry, like scores of other sectors that are dependent on supply chains and labor, is in flux like never before. An aging workforce and the looming retirement wave have been discussed for decades, but now companies are also wrestling with how to manage increased labor shortages, employee retention, skill gaps, supply chain disruptions, their "talent ecosystems" and safety protocols as many fluctuate between COVID-19 lockdowns. As a powerful engine for innovation, the chemical industry is also one of the most knowledge intensive. It is fighting a new wave of disruptors as a result of the "Great Resignation" and the realignment of talent as unforeseen ramifications of COVID and other global pressures continue.

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The U.S. chemical industry currently employs some of the oldest personnel among all manufacturing sectors. Tenured workers are opting to retire, taking their institutional knowledge with them. According to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor & Statistics](#), in 2021 the chemical industry workforce's median age was 44 years of age, with 23 percent of the sample at age 45 or more years.

Chemical companies, like those in other industries, are having to manage through changes they have never faced before. Leadership is being tested by new, rapidly emerging workplace standards and employee expectations that are higher than ever.

But our industry can provide a road map for hiring, retention, employee satisfaction and safety that any industry can benefit from.

We have implemented several strategies to build on a company's unique culture, challenging work orthodoxies of the past to reengage employees for impact and create a new foundation for employees to work smarter and safer in the future.

### **1. Rebrand the Industry Perception**

People want purpose. One of the outcomes of the "Great Resignation," perception or reality, is that employees are even more connected with their companies. The credibility bar is higher today. Employees want to work for a company that does right by the world.

In addition, companies need to work harder to educate prospective hires on their work in sustainability, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) so candidates can reframe their point of view and consider an older company with a new commitment to growth.

Purpose, sustainability and ESG plans now are a "must have" for company growth, reputation, environmental stewardship and retention. By focusing on DEI, the mix of voices and blend of knowledge contribute to innovation and the bottom line.



For employees, having a purpose and a sense of belonging to a company that is aligned with their own values creates a mentally healthy environment and can positively impact their mental health overall.

### **2. Enhance and Increase Communications**

It's critical that businesses shorten the distance from the boardroom to the shop floor, create a stronger level of engagement and increase your organization's commitment to change. It starts by articulating to employees their purpose, highlighting their contributions and showing them how much they are appreciated. It's vital to establish trust through transparency and communicating the "why" to employees, so they understand how their role makes a difference and how they matter in the big picture.

By mobilizing the insights of affective psychology to help businesses think "affectively," we help develop messages that tug at the heartstrings and resonate with employees. By developing memorable multimedia communications and delivering them through a variety of channels that cleverly combine data, narrative and images, you can reach what we call the "impact zone," to change attitudes and transform behaviors.

### 3. Coach and Train Leaders

Adding to that sense of purpose, employees want to feel there is a pathway of growth at their organization. Companies with supportive leaders who value coaching, training and listening skills are better able to provide the kind of mentorship and professional development that is vital to grooming the next generation of leaders.

Managers and directors who have the skills to communicate with authenticity and transparency help employees feel more connected to the company, its purpose and

mission. Businesses that assess training needs and take the time to identify and create leaders needed at every level ensure their teams execute on key objectives and add to the bottom line.

Building the communication highway between employees and leadership requires transparency, appreciation, education and mission building. Companies need to invest in the proper assessment as well as the design and delivery of training protocols that teach managers how to lead, manage safety and communicate effectively.

Training leaders with personalized and contextualized materials develops their skills and help them mentor future executives and build robust talent pipelines and succession plans. When senior leaders translate the company strategy into relevant information that resonates with their specific workforce, it lays the groundwork for a transformational journey for everyone.

### 4. Assess and Improve your Safety Culture

Where is your company on the journey to building a safe, sustainable and connected culture? Employees will gravitate to a culture with a foundation in safety. People do not want to work in an unsafe environment.



## 5. Rethink and Retrain around Safety

During times of increased staff turnover and absenteeism, the risk of safety incidents, near misses or worse, grows too. Employees well-versed in your safety culture and processes might be gone, and new contributors coming from diverse horizons, must be onboarded.

Your culture needs to be aligned with your organization's purpose. Where does your safety culture stand now, and where do you want it to be in your ideal, future state? Organizations need to reevaluate the type of training needed for new and veteran employees.

### The Great Reflection

The "Great Resignation" can be a time for great reflection. All companies need to have a strong culture to build on with savvy, future-proof leaders at the helm.

Leaders need to be confident in their change management style so they can manage talent disruption intuitively and build a strong, agile, capable workforce with a sense of belonging and purpose. Then they can give rise to an educated, well-trained, interdependent workforce able to create the profitable, safe growth of the company in a sustainable way.

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