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RE-HIRED

Catching a Boomerang? Pros and Cons of Rehiring Former Employees

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In today's highly competitive talent market, companies that have opted not to recruit former employees might want to reconsider. More employers appear to be open to returning workers.

Kronos, in a dedicated section of its website, encourages former employees to "boomerang back" to a career with the workforce management software company.

"Want to come back to Kronos? The door is open," the company says. "If your ideal career opportunity knocks twice at Kronos, we invite you to answer the door. We openly welcome high-performing former employees to rejoin our workforce."

More than 200 boomerang employees now work at the Massachusetts company, which says it has long bucked a common HR practice against rehiring former workers—even those who left in good standing.

"In this tight market right now where there don't seem to be enough workers to fill needs, I think that employers are looking very seriously at former employees," said Toby Haberkorn, senior recruiter and principal at Ayecer Group in Houston. A return employee is "a known quantity," she noted. "That's a big deal."

Assuming the employee is talented and left on good terms, the employer could gain a valuable, capable worker who is familiar with and likes the company and who may return with new skills. Among other potential benefits, the company may save money on recruiting and training costs.

On the other hand, the organization may have changed significantly since the former employee left, current workers may resent that one of their own didn't win the position, and colleagues may question whether the boomerang will leave again.

"The terms of how you left are critical. But if you left under good terms—and your former supervisors [and] co-workers remember you as being able to add value and that you have the specific skill set that is needed for the position—then there is a good possibility that you can be rehired," Haberkorn said.

Putting Career First

Kronos cites what it calls a fundamental shift in the employer-employee relationship.

"Historically, the employers held all the power. They provided the jobs, set the wages, and data wasn't transparent to job seekers. Today, driven by the war for top talent and new technologies, the paradigm has shifted," said Dave Almeda, its chief people officer.

"Now the employee has much more power, and progressive companies know it's their employees—engaged employees—that lead to success. Ultimately, it's outdated to see hard workers who leave as being disloyal," he said.

A 2015 national survey of HR professionals, managers and employees conducted by Kronos'

The Workforce Institute indicated that many organizations had policies against rehiring former workers but were warming to the idea.

Potential benefits include the returning employee's familiarity with the organization and culture and an ability to make a difference earlier and with less training than new employees, according to Kronos, which also says boomerangs can become strong corporate brand ambassadors.

All of these benefits assume, however, that the employee worked at the company within the past five years, Haberkorn noted. Someone who worked at the company 15 years earlier would need to be looked at essentially as a new employee, she said.

Revisit the Exit Interview

Organizations should consider the reasons why and circumstances in which the employee left the first time.

"Look back at their exit interview and refresh your memory on why they left. There are many reasons an employee could have left an organization, like wanting to try out a new industry, having to move for their spouse or starting a family," said Tom Gimbel, founder and CEO of staffing and recruiting firm LaSalle Network. "The biggest positive is that if they're coming back, it's probably because they really like the company and want to be there."

Boomerangs may face questions of loyalty and reliability, however. "They left once. Will they do it again?" Haberkorn asked.

Other potential pitfalls: Some people believe rehiring workers from the past will make it too easy for current employees to decide to quit. "However, if you want to deliver a great product or service, you need the best people. If the best people are former employees, then so be it," Almeda said.

Employees interested in returning should realize they can't simply walk back onto the team and will need to be interviewed, Gimbel said, noting that things have probably changed since they left. The interview can be a simple conversation with the manager, he said.

"If they are coming back at a higher position than when they left, be sure to communicate with staff why that's the case to eliminate the possibility of negative sentiment," Gimbel said. He recommends communicating the change to staff quickly and clearly and being open to their feedback to help avoid or limit disruption. "Explain how this rehire will positively impact the team and company," he said.

Employers can start laying the groundwork for rehiring strong staffers as employees leave the first time.

"When an employee exits an organization, don't let your ego get in the way. How an employee exits is just as important as how they are onboarded. If you let your ego get in the way when they quit, you'll burn a bridge," Gimbel said.

"Don't hold a grudge or give them attitude in their last days or weeks," he said. "Instead, offer to be a reference and wish them well. Once they leave, consider reaching out to them throughout the year to see how they're doing and how their new role is."