

# These workers quit their jobs and found better ones. Here's what they discovered.

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## FULL TEXT

There's a tendency in this country to believe that when people are struggling, it's because they didn't follow "The Rules": Study hard, work hard, get a college degree in your 20s, stay the course, retire at a prescribed age, don't complain. But workers who are quitting their jobs in "The Great Resignation" are discovering that the normal rules don't apply equally—or to every situation. Below are some of the lessons they have learned from these extraordinary times, distilled from hundreds of letters from readers.

### **Employers will overlook job-hopping**

Anthony Fuscellaro of Biddeford, Maine, has job-hopped for most of his working life since dropping out of college. He is now 30.

In March 2020, Fuscellaro was hired as a forklift operator in a company warehouse. For the first year, he said in an email, "I enjoyed working and believed that if I continued to give my all to the company, the company would give their all to me." But this summer, a heat wave pushed temperatures inside the warehouse above 130 degrees. Fuscellaro and others, suffering from heat exhaustion, were written-up for not meeting production quotas. Fuscellaro was hospitalized for heat stroke and suspended for missing work. "We had been working 60 to 72 hours a week on forced overtime. We were promised it would end at the end of August," he said. Instead the company laid off 25 employees and continued mandatory overtime for the rest. "That was the final straw for me. I quit. It was the best decision I ever made for my mental and physical health," Fuscellaro said.

Since then, Fuscellaro has been working gig jobs. He said he and his girlfriend are focusing on the day-to-day, instead of a longer-term future. "It's a complete flip from how we were living a year ago, but if you asked both of us, we are under way less stress and have a better functioning relationship than ever," he said.

While an inconsistent employment record was something to avoid before the pandemic, detours and short tenures are viewed with more understanding now.

"Everyone gets forgiveness for job-hopping during 2020 and 2021," career coach Lauren Milligan, CEO of ResuMAYDAY, told me in an email. "Almost every résumé I'm writing now is a transition résumé—people looking for their first post-pandemic job outside of what they did before 2020, or transitioning out of their pandemic bridge job."

"How people make a living and conduct a job search today looks nothing like 2019 and earlier," Milligan posted in online comments to an earlier column.

### **Training isn't always the answer**

Multiple readers told me they're enrolling in coding academies and boot camps to earn software certifications. But when money and time are limited, you should investigate whether the lesson is likely to be worth the investment. Doug, a hiring manager at a San Francisco start-up whose full name is being withheld as he is not authorized to speak publicly, said that when his company posts openings, "the jobs are, basically, flooded with applications from people who, often, have low experience, often recent graduates of 'code academies.'"

From what Doug has seen, "there are waves of job-seekers looking to (quickly) trade up into well-paying fields,

mostly looking to do remote work. And employers offer limited numbers of 'good' slots."

Do your research before diving into a certification program to confirm that the program is up-to-date, accepted by the target industry, and valued by employers.

Unless you know that training is the best means to a specific end —and especially if it requires more time and money than you can easily spare —consider investing in broader skill sets that will transfer to a variety of employers and fields.

### **Don't stay where you're not heard**

Workers are increasingly likely to leave when their concerns are not addressed. Ellen Goldlust had repeatedly complained about overwhelming workloads at her job at a North Carolina publisher. "The project editors would beg for help, our supervisor would say she would respond, but no improvement would occur, and the cycle repeated endlessly," she said in an email. When Goldlust got an offer at a Virginia publisher, she set aside anxieties that relocation would be stressful. "I am very glad I made the leap," Goldlust said. "My new colleagues treat me with respect and make me feel valued."

Michelle Kirby also landed in a better place after quitting her job as a restaurant manager at a Las Vegas casino three weeks ago.

After filling in for eight months as a hostess, cashier and food runner and performing other duties to make up for staff shortages when the restaurant cut workers' hours —all while dealing with belligerent customers —Kirby begged for increased staffing as business improved. But she was told the restaurant couldn't afford it. "You have it easy. Other managers have to cook, too," Kirby said she was told by her boss.

So Kirby quit. Now working at a Target in Las Vegas, she said she has no regrets. "This 'Great Resignation' we are going through is not because of pay rates and salaries. It's because people are being [stretched] too far."

### **Company loyalty goes both ways**

One of the top reasons workers are fleeing jobs is managers who emphasize hierarchy over humanity.

For James, an Iraq War veteran studying for an MBA in Texas, the decision to quit his project-management job was triggered by management's excessive demands and lack of compassion. "In the end, my old company showed me that they valued control (or the illusion of it) more than the welfare of the employees," James told me in an email.

Although his team was delivering good product on time while working remotely, James said managers would "freak out" whenever their Microsoft Teams status showed yellow, meaning they were away from the keyboard.

The last straw, James said, was when his sons contracted covid-19 and he needed to be home to look after them while his wife cared for their infant daughter. James's manager insisted he come to the office. Instead, James quit. "My new mantra revolves around the notion of no loyalty, but mutually beneficial relationships," says James. "The exchange is good until it's no longer good. To which the employee AND the employer are equal actors."

*For my next column, I'm writing about workers who haven't had as much luck quitting and securing a better job. Have you made the jump, but not found anywhere to land yet? What obstacles are you hitting? Write me at work.advice.wapo@gmail.com.*

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