

The “Great Resignation”

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I read an article recently, that said millions of Australians are predicted to quit their jobs in the coming months¹ – a trend that is being experienced in other parts of the world, coined “the Great Resignation”.

This trend is being driven by a profound shift in how people think about the role of work in their lives. The emphasis is now less on ambition, and more on other aspects of life. Pandemic-exhausted employees are seeking better conditions, better work life balance, and better workplace culture. While these motives may not be new (although, undoubtedly of greater importance to employees due to the pandemic) what *is* new, is that the pandemic has shifted the balance of power, from employers to employees², giving employees the opportunity to engage in work on their terms.

The sectors expected to be hardest hit by this trend include health, emergency services, and education. With one [article](#) suggesting that up to 760,000 essential workers could be at risk of leaving their frontline profession. This staggering prediction has left me contemplating what is in store for the emergency management sector, and particularly, for *women* in the emergency management sector.

We have seen the gendered impacts of the pandemic play out in front of us: the time women spend on caring responsibilities has increased, women have taken on more home-schooling responsibilities than men, and women comprise the majority of the healthcare workforce. We also know that social distancing and isolation measures have put women at risk of domestic violence³. With all of this in the mix, along with employees reporting they are feeling undervalued, under-consulted on return-to-work arrangements and tired of never-ending zoom calls, it shouldn't come as a surprise that women would consider reshaping their careers at this point in time.

When I first started out in my emergency management career, a little over 10 years ago, men vastly outnumbered women in the sector. Fast-forward to an interview I conducted earlier this year with two newcomers to the sector; they shared that, in their experience, the sector was quite balanced in terms of gender. While we may not have achieved gender equality yet, and certainly not in leadership roles, it is interesting to observe (anecdotally) these changes in just 10 years.

But will the hard-won gains of greater numbers of women entering the emergency management sector and building stellar careers, be lost with the Great Resignation? Or is this an opportunity for women to redefine the working environment and level the playing field? (A playing field that fundamentally has not changed or adapted to 21st century working conditions²). Is this a chance to address pay inequality by negotiating other benefits? Benefits that better facilitate the complex lives of women, and the contributions they make at home, in their community and at work?

Already, employers are bargaining on flexible work arrangements, remote working and 4-day weeks. It's no longer just about salary and wages, but working conditions more broadly.

With the Great Resignation trend expected to hit in Australia from March next year, we may now be about to witness an unparalleled loss of talent and experience from the sector, or we may be on the brink of one of the best opportunities for women in the emergency management sector to reimagine life at work.

¹ [The Great Resignation: Millions of Aussies could leave their jobs | news.com.au — Australia's leading news site](#)

² [Here comes the Great Resignation. Why millions of employees could quit their jobs post-pandemic - ABC News](#)

³ [Gendered impact of COVID-19 | WGEA](#)