Boomerang Employees – What Employers Need to Know about Rehiring Past Employees

As we all know, the pandemic has had lasting effects on the employment world. Some of the major trends we saw were mass layoffs, terminations, downsizing, and of course, the infamous move to remote work. Another trend we saw across the board was mass resignations as the pandemic led to many employees reevaluating their career paths. With the pandemic trends seemingly in the past, an anticipated recession on the horizon, and things getting back to "normal", the newest trend we are seeing in employment is rehiring and a surge in boomerang employees.

What is a boomerang employee?

A boomerang employee is an employee who left a company and later returns to work for the same company. The reasons for an employee's departure may vary, whether it be leaving to further their career in another opportunity, go back to school, for personal reasons or for personal growth, or simply to try something different; the important piece with boomerang employees is that they then return to their previous company. It's a pretty simple concept but boomerang employees tap into an interesting pool of candidates for your company. They provide both strengths and weaknesses and it's important for employers to understand the benefits or potential consequences of rehiring a past employee.

Advantages of hiring a boomerang employee

Rehiring a past employee can have many benefits to your hiring process. A former employee will already know your company's culture, and work and performance expectations. As their former employer, you will also have insights into whether that employee's character, work ethic and personality fit in with your current staff and company's values. Rehiring will also undoubtedly make your overall hiring and training process less cumbersome as returning employees will ideally be able to hit the ground running in their role. Even if the returning employee is being hired back into a different role, your company's same organizational groundwork remains and your focus with training can be on the new tasks rather than starting from scratch.

Disadvantages of hiring a boomerang employee

When hiring a boomerang employee, there is always the possibility that the employee will continue to be a flight risk. While all new hires have the potential to quit, an employee who has already left your company once may have a tendency to do it again.

You do not want to waste time and money retraining an employee who may just up and leave again if something better comes along.

Depending on how long the employee has been away, your company's values, structure and goals may have changed or evolved and it can be hard to instill these new mindsets in a boomerang employee. Rehiring a past employee could lead to an unintentional sense of entitlement or seniority, where the employee feels they need to assert their place. Another potential disadvantage to hiring a boomerang employee, and a tale as old as time, is old habits die hard. Boomerang employees can recreate bad working relationships that may have existed in the past or create a sense of "well we used to do it this way" mindset.

Things to keep in mind when interviewing and hiring a boomerang employee

When interviewing and hiring a boomerang employee, you want to make sure you do your due diligence in learning how that employee performed prior to leaving, what made them leave in the first place, and most importantly, what they've been doing since working for you.

Asking a boomerang employee what led them to leave and what is drawing them back again gives an interesting insight into the ebbs and flows of your company and the reasons employees leave as well as the reasons they want to work for you. This can be a learning experience for you too as to what to improve on in your company's day-to-day workings.

In learning about what the employee has been doing since leaving our company, you can gain valuable insight into where they could potentially (re)land. Did they go back to school? Have they been bettering their skill sets? What new assets are they able to bring to the table?

During the interview and hiring process, you want to be clear, concise and transparent about your intentions. This is important for both the employer and the employee. You want to take into account where the employee see themselves in the future with your company so you are able to set the groundwork for mutual growth.

It's also very important to not skip the onboarding or training process when rehiring a past employee. You want to set all employees up for success and even though they've worked there before, certain standards may have changed and you want to ensure the boomerang employee is well-versed in both the older and new standards of your company. This will also help reduce a hierarchy that may be instilled by a returning employee and will create a new dynamic that is not based on older ways.

Source: Spring Law

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