

# deVolkskrant

## With your resignation video on TikTok

*It is called the "Great Resignation" in the U.S. Americans who are quitting their jobs in droves for more money and appreciation elsewhere. On TikTok, they share horror stories and advice.*

**By Maral Noshd Sharifi**



Kaarsten Walden (37) had no idea that she was part of an economic revolution. For five years she worked at the Virginia Zoo as a social media manager, 'but they asked if I could also give training and then also clean some lofts'. When she asked for a raise, it was "unfair to everyone else." Walden became frustrated, tired, uninspired after a few years. "I used to cry in my car in the parking lot for five minutes in the morning before I started my workday." She put money aside for several months as a buffer, and her husband helped. She resigned in August.

Shortly afterwards, she posted a video on TikTok. She waved a notepad full of reasons. She was underpaid, her job was stressful, she had no career advancement opportunities. In short, Walden says on the video: 'Not cool!' She turned out not to be the only one. Many similar videos started appearing on social media, all of them of people quitting their jobs or considering it. "Girl, congratulations on your resignation," Walden replies. 'I am so happy for you!'

Walden is one of the faces of what is called the Great Resignation in the United States. After the Great Depression (1929-1939), the Great Moderation (1984-2007) and the Great Recession (2007-2013), an era has now dawned in which employees are resigning en masse and looking for something better. "Rarely has the economy seen such a mismatch between where the greatest demand for workers is and where people want to work," The Washington Post recently reported.

In December, the total workforce was 162.3 million, of which 4.3 million resigned. In all of 2021, 47.4 million Americans resigned, 10 million more than in 2020. These people want higher wages, more free time, flexible employers or better working conditions. And often with success, many quickly find a new job.

The same picture shows the U.S. unemployment figures. During the lockdown in April 2020, 14.8 percent were unemployed, but that figure has now fallen to 4 percent. Employers hardly ever fire their staff. In December, that percentage was just 0.8 percent, the lowest in twenty years. Employers are holding on to their staff and trying to fill even more vacancies at the same time. By the end of 2021, nearly 11 million jobs were available, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. It gives employees a stronger position vis-à-vis employers.

Kaarsten Walden resigned because she wanted to be able to organize her days more freely. America's work culture dates back to the last century. "We don't all work in a factory anymore, do we? We can now work anywhere at any time of the day. Why does it have to be in an office between 9 and 5 o'clock?" She feels part of a movement that wants to seize power from companies and organizations that pose 'like one big family' on the first day of work, but in the end 'never the best with have in mind'.

The Great Resignation is a symptom of economic prosperity. Even though inflation in the United States is now high – 7 percent – people are optimistic about their job prospects. It proves that the American economy has recovered after the coronavirus dip. More than 20 million Americans lost their jobs at the start of the pandemic, and now companies are fighting each other for enough staff. Many elderly people took early retirement during the coronavirus crisis, which also resulted in new vacancies. Wages go up, and bonuses make work more attractive. This has significantly strengthened the position of workers in the U.S.

When employers fight over you, you can make more demands. And if they don't listen, why not apply to one of those thousands of other vacancies? "History shows that when the economy is doing well, people are more likely to quit," says sociologist Dan Cornfield, who studies shifts in the labor market at Vanderbilt University. "But that alone doesn't make it a Great Resignation. There is more going on here."

The Great Resignation is the climax of a development that has already started before the pandemic: a cultural shift among some of the educated jobseekers in their twenties and thirties, Cornfield says. "They are making more and more demands on their employers. Besides their job, they want free time to relax. Some want their management to speak out on social issues, such as racism and women's rights. They demand rules of conduct for the workplace."

The pandemic has increased the need for more flexible employers, says Cornfield of Nashville, Tennessee. Employees were suddenly given a lot of responsibilities during the coronavirus crisis. From home they took care of children or a sick parent and then they also had to finish their work on time. "The new demands they were already making before the pandemic became more urgent due to the pandemic."

The American need for better working conditions is reflected on TikTok, where a Great Resignation community has sprung up. Employees who have doubts about their job can come here for tips and mental support about everything that has to do with dismissal. In the offline world, it may have been embarrassing not to have a job for a while, but nothing is taboo on TikTok. With the hashtag #greatresignation, which has brought in 90 million hits, people share raw experiences about managers treating them like “slaves.”

### **The measure full**

Montez Braxton (22) even shared a video on TikTok during his resignation. “When I think back to that day, I get angry again,” he says. He worked (converted) for \$8.20 an hour at a McDonald's in Richmond, Virginia, and grew more frustrated by the day. “You always have to deal with rude customers there, but the pandemic made my work dangerous.” Visitors were obliged to put on their mouth masks, but when Braxton pointed this out to them, they became furious. Another factor was that many of Braxton's colleagues stayed home sick, so the workload increased. “At the drive-in I sometimes had to take the order, then quickly pack all the burgers and fries and then drop everything off at the next window.” And all this under the watchful eye of a manager who treated him “like s--t”.

His mother and grandmother did not understand his complaints. They thought he should be thankful he had a job at all. One day it was enough for Braxton. During his break, he decided to stay away for good. Which helped: he was entitled to 'stimulus checks', a benefit of about 266 euros per week that the government paid out to unemployed Americans until September 2021. While that money gave many people some temporary breathing room, experts don't see it as a major cause of the Great Resignation.

In the parking lot opposite McDonald's, Braxton told his followers not to return to that restaurant with the big yellow M. “Yeah, I just quit my job,” he said in the video that later went viral, “F—k McDonald's, the is a crappy place!” Braxton now delivers packages for Amazon for \$14.40 an hour. He has made an appointment with himself. “Wherever I work, I must be treated well. If that doesn't happen, I'll pack my bags.”

### **U.S. workforce shortage**

The U.S. economy is recovering from the pandemic, with the result that many new jobs have been created. People who are dissatisfied with their job can look for something new without too much risk. As of December 2021, there were nearly 11 million jobs available in the United States. Most of the job openings, nearly two million, are in education and healthcare — sectors that are suffering greatly from the pandemic. Many people are sick and overworked.

The staff shortage in hospitals is so dire that the state of California is considering allowing staff who are infected with coronavirus but have no symptoms to work. Some medical institutions recruit staff from countries such as Ghana, Nigeria and the Philippines. According to the most recent figures, from December, the majority of Americans who quit their job were in the hospitality industry (6 percent), retail (4.9 percent) and commerce and transportation (3.8 percent). It leads to several problems: too few truck drivers to transport goods, too few snowblowers to clear the streets, restaurants closing earlier than usual.