00:09 - 03:12
Cara Silletto
Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast. I'm your contributor host Cara Silletto. If we haven't met yet, I'm the president and chief retention officer at Magnet Culture, a firm dedicated to reducing unnecessary employee turnover. And I am the creator of the employee retention ecosystem, which we are going to talk more about today. On my last episode, I introduced this idea of the ecosystem, and we talked through the evolution of the workforce, how the workforce used to be like deep-rooted oak trees that are pretty dependable and sturdy and stable, and they didn't often transplant themselves.

You know, they would stay at a company for a long, long time. And now our new workforce, unlike deep rooted trees, is more like house plants. And I mean that a great way there. There's a variety of wonderful, beautiful, fabulous house plants, but instead of oak trees, they value mobility, right? Where trees might value that stability and depth. The new workforce today wants to be able to move, wants to be able to grow in their careers either at the same organization or, of course, be able to bounce around if needed. Also, this house plant theory explains that every single person on our staff is like a different house plant, which means they have a different need from their leaders.

We cannot treat people as one size fits all any longer; every single person on our team, similarly to those we serve and those we care for, needs an individualized care plan. So today I'm going to share a glimpse into this new comprehensive retention model that guides organizations to work on various aspects of their business, their organizational culture, and even the structure of the company and the org chart, so that we can truly create a place where people want to work.

Now, I've been doing this work for the last 13 or so years, and most of that within the whole continuum of care, of health care, especially the senior care side. And we saw folks kind of piecemeal their efforts and going from one thing to another, you know, onboarding to compensation, leadership development, things like that. And they didn't actually have this holistic approach where everything is connected.

So, after, like I said, 13 years of doing retention work, we finally put all of the different pieces that we feel need attention into this one model. This is the employee retention ecosystem model. So if you think about the word ecosystem, some people kind of ask me, okay, what is that again or what. Like, I haven't used ecosystem in more of a business sense? Right. Because we think ecosystem like in the ocean or in our backyard, with all those predators and prey and, you know, maybe a tree drops an acorn, and the squirrel uses the acorn or plants the acorn, and it makes another tree, and the worms are involved in the soil,l and all of those things.

03:12 - 05:25
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Well, any ecosystem you think about under, you know, in the ocean or in your backyard, you have to think about all the parts, have to work together, right? They all have their own responsibility, their own role in that ecosystem. And when one thing isn't working well, it's really hard for the other folks to do their job or for the ecosystem to really be healthy and sturdy. So we applied that into the work world and said, all right, what does a struggling ecosystem look like, and what does a thriving ecosystem look like? So when I talk to organizations that are struggling with retention and their culture, oftentimes the executives feel they're just not getting any ROI from their initiatives. They're throwing money at things, but they're not seeing the return and the consistency on that.

The leaders also feel totally behind, just underwater all the time. They are struggling to get their head above water at any given point, and that is frustrating and not sustainable. Right? And then of course, the staff, they feel overworked and undervalued. My boss doesn't have time for me. They're always in meetings. They're always fighting fires. And we see these struggling ecosystems all the time, where people can envision a better future. Man, wouldn't it be nice if. But they don't necessarily know how to get there. So when we ask that question of what it looks like if you had a thriving ecosystem?

And also, when I've been able to see those with my own eyes, we find that in those scenarios, the executives have clarity. They are able to expedite their cultural initiatives and efforts because they know what direction they're going, and they know how everything impacts the other components of that culture as well. Then in the thriving ecosystem, the leaders finally find time to truly lead their team and to be there for their staff, for mentoring, for onboarding, for better communication, all those things. And the staff then realize, wow, I found a great place to work. So I'm going to come back tomorrow because this place doesn't suck. Sorry to be crass, but just try to lighten the mood here a little bit.

05:25 - 08:33
Cara Silletto
All right, so with that idea of kind of what does a struggling ecosystem look like versus a thriving ecosystem, now we just need to figure out whose role is what. What are the responsibilities that everybody in the organization needs to own in order to get this change? All right. So, if you would, as you envision this ecosystem that I'm about to describe to you, I want you to think first about all the employees are different house plants.

So just imagine kind of a room full of all these different types of house plants. You've got high maintenance, low maintenance, everything in between, maybe some tropical, all those things. Okay. Well, that means if the staff are the house plants, then our leaders are the gardeners. So, envision a watering can. You know, some hand tools for gardeners.

And they're walking around that room, checking in on each one of their individual plants, making sure that they have what they need. All right. So the leaders are the gardeners. Well, then what does that make the executive team? How do they plan into this? Well, the executives are the

providers who create this environment. So you could kind of put maybe a greenhouse type of, covering over this group to say, all right, the executives are going to protect these house plants and the gardeners, and the executive team is going to give those house plants and gardeners the tools and the resources that they need to be successful.

All right. So that's kind of the first visualization that I want you to think about. Is this room full of house plants? You've got the gardener managers walking around with all their tools, taking care of their people. And then that executive team has created the roof, the walls, all the resources. The supply closet is full of everything that everybody needs because the executive team has given them those resources.

Okay. So the other visual that I want you to kind of envision with me is that some people are left-brain and right-brain. And so we also wanted to make a kind of textbook model of this framework that we now work from. So if you think about it, start in the middle. We're just going to have a circle. And that circle is broken down into three different roles. This is our staff, our leaders, and our executives. Now each one of those three roles has two responsibilities, okay. Each one has two different responsibilities. So for the staff, for example, we want every single person in our organization to be able to take root in their job and grow in their position.

Now, under these responsibilities, it dives deeper into all the different actions they have to take. But the way that we think about this takes root is I want somebody to come into their job. I want them to show up, to be mindful of those around them, and to build connections.

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That's the basics, right? Wouldn't it be nice if every single employee that we hired came in and they took root in their position, they showed up, they were mindful of others, and they started building connections with those that we serve and those that they work with? Wouldn't that be great? This is kind of the fundamental baseline of where we need to be now. There's a second responsibility for the staff as well. Once they take root in their position, we want them to grow in their role. Now, the actions that we have seen that we need to help people. Sometimes this takes mentoring and guidance. But we want folks to learn to speak more thoughtfully and just more effectively, right? We can all communicate better over time. We need everybody to be able to make adjustments is the second action, there. And the third one is to think critically.

Hopefully, in every position, every role in the organization. People know how to troubleshoot their own role, their own job. In fact, we've seen kind of a decline of critical thinking and problem solving in some of our workforce for various reasons, including just having instant access to information at our fingertips makes us not necessarily have to think on our feet as quickly, and we tend to go to our bosses and say, hey, boss, I got a problem, can you fix it instead of using those critical thinking muscles right now?

So we see a lot of organizations wanting to help their staff to speak more thoughtfully, to learn to make those adjustments and handle change, and also think more critically in their role. That's more of the advanced-level skills that we want everyone to have. So all staff, no matter what level, we want them to take root in their position and grow in their role.

Now let's shift over to the leaders section of our circle here. And the leaders have two responsibilities: to acclimate new hires and to cultivate their team. So what does that mean? Acclimate breaks down into giving guidance to those new hires. That's the onboarding and mentoring right out the gate. When folks join the organization.

Acclimate also means we've got to strengthen the team and do some team building. You know, a lot of companies kind of put team building on the back burner. They just think, oh, hey, Shelly's new on our team. Hey, everybody, this is Shelly. Shelly, this is everybody. All right, get to work. And they're not actually building that team and that trust and that camaraderie. So these managers have got to take ownership of making sure that folks not only come in and know how to do the job, but that they also know who they're working with and can start building that family or team within the team environment there.

The other way to acclimate new hires is to show support. So, checking in regularly with them, making sure they have additional resources to learn their job and to better understand the team as well. So acclimate is the big first part of the leader's responsibilities. The second responsibility is to cultivate their team. So this is ongoing now. A lot of us do have new hires coming in all the time, and the acclimate part is also ongoing.

But for every employee on your team, you have to think about cultivating the relationships and their skills, their knowledge of the work, those kinds of things. So the three actions under cultivate are to provide feedback that is both positive and constructive feedback to encourage advancement, and to help them grow in their positions. We want them to grow, as we said earlier. So the managers need to help with that. Mentoring and finding opportunities for advancement. Even if there's no promotion available. There are a lot more ways to grow your knowledge, your network, and be able to grow your skills within your position as well.

And then, of course, the third one is for the leaders to help navigate change for their team. We are constantly changing and updating systems and processes and team members and those we serve, and even the building we're in, and all of these things. And so, it's the leader's responsibility to help navigate that change for their folks as well. So, so far, here's a little recap we've got. We want everyone to take root and grow. And then we've got leaders who we want to acclimate the new hires and cultivate their entire team.

12:55 - 15:11
Cara Silletto
All right. So just two main responsibilities for each one. We're going to shift over to the third area in the circle, which is our executive team. And there are two responsibilities: to establish the

right environment. Remember that kind of greenhouse-looking protective shield around our house plants. They have to establish that environment and then equip the leaders and staff with the resources they need. So in our model, the three actions that have to be taken in order to establish the right environment are, first, we have to assess the values of this organization. And I know a lot of people have very long-standing values and mission statements, vision, those types of things. But right now, we have to reassess and make sure that we are attractive as far as our values and our mission and vision for the new workforce. So I see a lot of companies kind of updating and upgrading those as well, which we'll dive into in a future episode here on Bridge the Gap as well. We also want folks to set priorities.

Some companies don't have enough retention-based priorities. And other companies I see overloading their priorities and having way too many on their leaders' plates. So kind of keep that in check. And the other way to establish the right environment, once we have the right values and the right priority set, is to analyze the capacity, what does it look like? What does a new org chart look like? If you were to start from scratch and not just take the old org chart that we have tweaked and tweaked and tweaked and tweaked and tweaked.

But to say, what do our team members really need? How many direct reports should leaders really have? And who owns retention? We'll talk again later about kind of roles in HR and what that needs to look like as well. But we have to take a real look at our capacity to make sure that we have the right people in the right seats, as we say. And be sure we're not, overloading folks, because that will cause not only the person who's overloaded to leave, but even worse, if it's a leader who's overloaded, it'll push a lot of their staff members to leave because their staff don't feel like they have a boss that has time for them and can check in with them and help them and support them.

15:11 - 20:04
Cara Silletto
All right. So, moving on to the last section here, the last, the responsibility that the executives have is to equip the leaders and the staff with the resources that they need. So those three actions are first to develop the leaders, make sure that they have ongoing leadership training, not just compliance training and operational training, but actual leadership skills of building emotional intelligence, communication, and empathy, and different skills that are needed to get, manage, and keep today's new workforce. The second is to leverage technology. We have to make sure that the equipment that our staff and leaders are using is up to date and well-maintained. So some companies I talked to are actually pretty out of date and behind on their technology, which is a hindrance for their team. And others are right where they need to be.

But technology changes quickly. So we have to look forward and make sure that we are leveraging the technology as best we can to lighten the load for our folks. You know, in our field, we tend to ask our people year after year after year to do more with less, do more with less, do more with less. And unfortunately, I don't think we can really do more with less. But there is some technology, including AI and things like that, that are hopefully going to help us move

forward. We're already seeing some of that. Of course, it's not replacing bedside care or anything like that, but we can definitely find some efficiencies on our operational and administrative side over time, if not with others' support for our caregiving as well.

So just make sure that we're kind of checking in on the technology that we're not getting behind with. That is a big piece of equipping our folks with what they need, and the final piece of equipment that we need to provide our leaders and staff is meaningful compensation. So that means that it's not just the same old compensation model that we've always had in the past, but really realizing what means something to our staff and our leaders. As far as sacrifice, for example, it used to be we paid a lot more for the overnight third shift, which was the hardest one to fill back in the day. But now I find that with a lot of organizations, the second shift is the hardest to fill. So we switch the compensation and make the differential on the second shift more hefty than on the third shift, because we have to pay for that sacrifice of people not being able to head home and have dinner with their family and put their kiddos to bed and things like that.

So, we have to really think differently about having meaningful compensation, to equip our leaders with that tool to keep people, and to compensate fairly and effectively with our staff to be more attractive as an organization that draws in strong talent. I know that was so much to cover, but if you want to see the graphics for this, we will put them in the show notes. And also, if you go to employee retention ecosystem.com, you can see all of these graphics that I'm describing here. And kind of follow along and see how that goes, now I want to share with you also a tool that we put together.

So there are a lot of these different components. Like I said 18 different actions that have to be taken by staff, by leaders, and by executives combined. Luckily hese 18 different areas can be assessed. So we actually created an 18-statement audit tool that you can go to magnetvault.com and download that audit. It gives you one statement about each one of these areas. So, for example, it says things like, you know, our staff feel that team members build positive connections with one another. Our staff feel that team members are mindful of how their words and actions impact others. Then there are leadership questions about whether our staff feels that leaders show sufficient appreciation and provide meaningful feedback. Or, our leaders give effective guidance to them through ongoing organizational changes. Of course, there's executive level questions about those mission, vision, and values that we talked about, about clear priorities and sustainable workloads.

And so if you're not sure which of these areas your organization needs to focus on, or if you want to figure out, are we missing a piece of this? Because if you're just working on one piece of the puzzle and you don't realize that other pieces are either missing or need work, or they're going to be affected by the change you're making on the other side, you may negate yourself. or just be throwing money at initiatives that are not helpful at all.

20:04 - 25:01

Cara Silletto
So definitely go to magnetvault.com, check out the audit. And an interesting thing that we have done with this audit is we force leaders before they answer the questions, we force them to take off their leadership hat, take it off, act like staff, take this assessment as if you were staff. Think about this for just a second. Even if you're not going to go and do the assessment, just think about this for a second.

If you were to look at your organization from the staff's perspective or from a candidate or applicant's perspective, are we as attractive as we think we are? You know, because a lot of these areas of the audit tool, what I find in my workshops is when I have the leaders fill these out and we look at the scores and kind of debrief all of that, we find out that if they had taken the audit or if they had assessed themselves with their own lens, then they're going to score higher, right?

You're going to give yourself a higher score if you are scoring yourself because of something like, if I were to ask, how good is your onboarding rate? How effective is your onboarding? You might include your intention or your historical knowledge and say, well, it's better than it used to be. So it's not perfect, but it's not bad where a new hire coming in might walk in and see even the newer, updated version of your onboarding, and they might say, this is bad. This is not fun, it's not good, it's not effective. And so you tend to, as a leader, score yourself a bit higher, a bit more positively, because you know that you're trying and you've put that intent, and historical knowledge into the score. So it's fascinating to me because we score when you do the audit, we score folks on.

Are you thriving in that area, or are you just surviving in that area, or are you honestly wilting in that area? And it needs some serious attention. And sometimes I'll have a person who comes back with their scores, and they've got almost all thriving, like, you know, fours and fives out of five. And they're saying, yeah, we're doing great, we're doing great. And what's interesting is sometimes those people are just delusional, and they are not at all in tune with what's actually going on around them. Which sometimes happens. And then other times when I ask them more about, okay, wow, you're thriving in all these areas, tell me what you've done. What have you put effort into improving over the last couple of years?

And they will start listing out, well, we started doing this, and we started doing that. And you know, they've revamped their onboarding again. They've revamped their compensation model. They're doing leadership development. They've got all these investments of time and dollars that are going into it. And, they have really put their money where their mouth is. So sometimes you can have a really strong positive score. But a lot of times, I'm finding that our organizations, in particular within this field, tend to be surviving. We tend to be just getting through every day and just trying to put one foot in front of the other to get to the next day. And that's not a fun place to be.

It's not an exciting place to be. And our managers and leaders certainly are not happy to stay in that space when they'd really like to go on vacation, and not come back feeling completely

underwater and behind at the time. But that's the reality that we're sitting in right now. So where do we go from here? I recommend that you take the audit yourself if you haven't already paused and gone to get that at magnetvault.com, and I also encourage you, you know, if you want real change, if you want real action to happen, the best way that I see that happen is when the entire executive team in particular, and sometimes going all the way down, the whole leadership team when they do this audit activity together, when you send out the audit and say, let me know your true and honest thoughts. If you were to put yourself in the staff's shoes, remember that important instruction that's on there and collect that information. Take a look at which areas all of the leaders agree need some work, and maybe there are areas that you disagree on.

Some departments or some areas might say no, but I think our onboarding is great. And others say nope, nope, nope. It needs a lot of work, right? Different folks may have different opinions, but I often find that a lot of times the leadership team tends to be on the same page about where the actual issues are. They have just never done an activity this deep with these 18 different areas, to really explore all the reasons that people are quitting today.

25:01 - 25:01
Cara Silletto
So be careful not to. Once you take the audit, especially if your executive team is totally on board with this and says, yes, we're going to start prioritizing based on our low scores and what we need to improve. Be careful not to overcommit yourself and say, well, these five areas of the 18 need work. So, hey, person number one, you go work on that. Person number two, you work on that one. Person number three, you work on that one and start delegating everything. In fact, we created a retention roadmap. It's really just a calendar. Okay.

I'll let the cat out of the bag. It's just a blank calendar, but we use it in our workshops to help leaders to prioritize and say, okay, for Q1, this is what we're going to focus on. And then for Q2, this is what we're going to focus on. Instead of just making a long list of priorities, actually scheduling those out quarter by quarter of what is realistic, what can we, truly commit to and promise and fulfill to show our team that we are headed in the appropriate direction and that we're listening to them and we're going to continue creating that better place to work.

All right. So I hope that this was a great overview for you to understand how complex and comprehensive Retention is. It's not just a silver bullet issue of yeah, well, just pay your people more or just do this. Just do that. It really does take a more holistic view and an approach that is going to attack different, weaker areas, not all at once, but in the right priority and at the right time to get to where you want to go. So you've got to be realistic about it. Okay. Now, this whole series, I'm doing an episode a month on this ecosystem and retention strategies and the evolution of the workforce. So throughout this year, I'm going to be diving into different components of the ecosystem. So we are going to talk about all the different areas that we can dive into, like leadership development and onboarding and change management, you know, all these different areas. So make sure to come back, subscribe today so that you can be notified when new episodes of mine and the whole contribution team is coming out.

We'll be talking more. I know about professionalism, values, and capacity, so I just can't wait. I'm excited to dive in a little later. If you want to keep in touch between now and my next episode, I am on LinkedIn. It's Cara Silletto. That's Cara with a C. And thanks so much for listening to this week's Bridge the Gap Contributor Wednesday.