

00:09 - 05:02

Cara Silletto

Welcome to the Bridge the Gap podcast. I'm your contributor host today, 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'm the creator of the employee retention ecosystem. I got to tell you, today's discussion is about to get real. I just cannot hold my tongue any longer, friends.

And I've got some things to talk about. So today we're going to talk about worker capacity. They're workloads that are out of whack, job descriptions that have swollen beyond recognition, and org charts that are out of date and honestly out of touch with reality. I'm seeing it more and more. And so we've got to talk about this today.

If you're in an executive seat, stay with us. And I'm going to share with you some new ideas about workloads and org charts. And if you're in a leadership role before we're done today, I definitely have some tips for how you can handle the cards that you've been dealt if you don't have control over those workloads and org charts as well.

So hopefully there's going to be a little nugget of wisdom for everybody here today. So I hope you're ready. Let's go. In our employee retention ecosystem model that was just launched in 2025. I explained it a few episodes ago. If you missed that Bridge the Gap episode, you can go back and watch the model. But what I'm planning to do in some upcoming episodes is dive into certain segments and business areas.

So today, one that I want to focus on, it continues to come in with low scores. Every time we do our assessment tool around the ecosystem, almost every company we work with, the analyze capacity area comes in with one of the lowest scores. And that's because the statement that you have to rate. So this is kind of the definition of analyze capacity.

The statement is our staff feel the organization maintains sustainable workloads for staff and leaders. All right I'm gonna say it again. Our staff feel the organization maintains sustainable workloads for staff and leaders. So when we have a chance to dive deeper, you know, some some of our assessments, it's just 1 to 5. Do you agree with that? Do you disagree with that?

But some groups we get to dive deeper with and we created a rubric for those organizations that are really diving into the ecosystem to figure out what exactly does a one out of five mean, or a three out of 5 or 5 out of five? So we defined it, and I want to share those with you to ponder for a moment.

So if we are really a five out of five thriving, we are knocked out of the park on analyzed capacity. The definition that we have for that five out of five is that staffing levels, workloads and roles are recalibrated regularly for sustainability because we know that some jobs, you know, they they swell over time as the term I like to use.

I've never seen us in senior care in 20 years. Very rarely are regulations taken off of our plate. But instead it's more and more and more regulations put on. So that's an example of one part of our job description to maintain the regulatory compliance. It just swells. It gets more complicated and more time intensive. Right. So this five out of five I would say that if you're a five out of five, you would have to be able to prove that your staffing levels, workloads and roles are recalibrated regularly for sustainability.

Now, I didn't say that we have the proper workloads right now. To me, a forward thinking organization is one that has these recurring conversations just like every few years or now, every year you're going to do a comp analysis to make sure we're hitting the mark. I also think we should be recalibrating and reviewing and revamping those job descriptions over time to maintain that sustainability.

So that's what a five is. A five is really recalibrating regularly that somebody is looking at that, whether it's the team or, you know, senior leadership team, home office, whomever. But the key is being intentional about our workloads and more forward thinking as well. Then a three out of five is what we would call surviving. Now, this definition of a three, if you were going to select that would be leadership acknowledges there are workload issues but struggles to fix them.

So it's not that we're blind to them. We just are doing the best we can right where hey there. That's where almost everybody scores is kind of between that two and four. And right around that surviving function of just, we know it exists and we're just doing the best we can. We really do struggle to fix it. So you're not alone.

05:02 - 09:06

Cara Silletto

If you if you sit in that level, then a one out of five, which is what we call wilting. No, right. The one out of five is that staff are stretched thin. Burnout is common, and open roles go unfilled. So unfortunately, I do see a lot of organizations that this is happening. The staff are constantly stretched thin. Burnout is common and just causing people to walk out the door and open roles continue to be unfilled.

Even when we open or fill open positions, another position becomes open, and it's kind of this never ending battle. So that is different than the three, because the three is at least people acknowledge it and are saying, well, we're trying and we'll fill in what we can where a one out of five is really just this is all happening and nobody's nobody's owning it.

Nobody is really making any effort or even acknowledgment of making a change to make that better. So I'm curious what your score would be. Right. If you think about it on your analyzed capacity, how well do you think the organization maintains sustainable workloads for staff and leaders? Now, in most of our workshops, we we don't ask people to score 1 to 5 on that as themselves, because when we sit in a leadership position, we're like, it's better than it used to be.

So I'll give us a four, you know, or we'll trying. We have a lot of priorities. We're trying. And so I'm going to give us that 3 or 4 where if I asked your staff which is what we do during our workshops, we say, leaders, take off your leadership hat and act like staff. If I were to ask staff how well they think the company manages these workloads, what would they say?

And if you've got folks on the floor that are constantly understaffed, they're constantly dealing with overload and more and more and more put being put on their plates. We're going to give you a 1 or 2, not a five. So there's a difference in score of what your leadership team thinks versus what your actual frontline staff is going to think as well.

It's all relative. And if you haven't been to magnetvault.com, that is our hidden treasure trove of resources where you can go download the ecosystem audit and figure out what your analyze capacity score is. You might even want to send out that question or statement in a pulse survey on your employee engagement survey tools. You could go ahead and just ask, what do they think about the workloads?

Are they currently sustainable moving forward? And you know, I'm not even going to go there. But another word is are they attractive? You know sustainable is can we can we keep going like this. But also we need ideally for our workloads to be attractive that other people would want to come work here because we don't overload our people and we don't run short staffed all the time.

Right. That's another piece of the puzzle, is that attractiveness. But the reason I can't keep my mouth shut this week is I have had multiple conversations across the country this week with senior care executives. I was working with an independent building, just one location. I was at a big conference where I sat and talked with a big, large corporate group about these capacity issues.

I mean, everybody's dealing with it no matter what size you are in this space. And I find sometimes it's a little scary that we get our senior care or post-acute care blinders on and we talk to each other. And because everybody in the industry is dealing with the same thing, we normalize it and we're like, well, it is what it is, you know?

But I do 80% of my business in senior care, and I purposefully go work with a few others, like construction, manufacturing, hospitality, other groups that have lower wage frontline workers, and I continue to see them solving things in a different way that I hope to bring into senior care when I can find something applicable there. So I just don't want us to chat with one another and think, this is all totally okay, because it just is what it is.

09:06 - 15:21

Cara Silletto

Now, there are certainly challenges that we have for recruiting and retaining folks that are unique to our industry that we have to accept. But the workloads, that's not something we have

to accept. We can say we're going to attack this. We are going to make some changes, right? So one of the big problems that I'm seeing that lies ahead of us is this is a tough pill to swallow.

They'll workaholic era is over. All right. I'm going to say that again. The workaholic era is over. And unfortunately, this profession depended upon finding and hiring and keeping workaholics, especially in those senior roles. Administrators and other department heads that we just had that mantra. You stay till the job gets done, right. And it worked for a while, especially with the Boomer and Gen X leadership.

They were raised with that type of mindset, but now the younger workforce is not going to act that way as we're hiring administrators and other department heads that are in their 30s and 40s. Some are even in their 20s. I mean, they're total rockstars, but but some of them are not going to put up with that as well.

So if you think about it, I want you to think for a moment about your most productive people on your team. And chances are, they're working nights and weekends or late days, you know all of that. But I'll tell you, I am predicting right now, from everything I'm seeing going on with the evolution of the workforce and how our businesses operate.

I'm predicting right now it is going to take you two people, at least the two replace that rock star. Are you prepared for that? Is your budget prepared for that? I just talked to a group that lost their maintenance director, and their maintenance director was so knowledgeable and so productive. Just got everything done, so dependable, and the company literally had to hire two people to replace that person when he left, when he retired, because the next generation just going to work that hard, if they're not compensated in, in the way that they feel they need to be compensated for those extra hours, right.

So a lot of senior care groups right now are also telling me, not only is it hard to recruit and retain CNAs and housekeepers and other frontline staff, but they're finding it harder today to recruit and keep the administrators and the doers, especially with all this regulatory and reimbursement knowledge that's needed in that space. But it's often because once these people get into those roles, they quickly realize that those specific jobs are unsustainable.

They get in there, they start seeing the issues and they cannot possibly do everything the company is expecting. From getting financial performance metrics to quality care metrics to regulatory compliance needs and be the people leader that today's new workforce needs, right? And the people leader side, of course, is to reduce turnover. And it's associated costs as well. So I am seeing some organizations make adjustments now so that their rock stars that are workaholics, honestly, that those folks don't burnout and leave.

They have realized what that cost is going to be. Because I'll tell you, I got a lot of Gen X friends. You know, many of you know, I'm a millennial born in the 80s, but I've been working 20 plus years and a lot of my friends in these past few years post-pandemic, they have hit a wall and said, enough is enough.

I used to do whatever was needed and stay till the job gets done, and I'm just not going to do that anymore because I can't. I can't keep doing this right. So some of these groups are realizing that they're going to lose those key, whether they're baby boomers, Gen Xers, millennials or Gen Z, they're going to lose these key people if they don't get their workload back in check.

Right. And unfortunately, I still see a lot of executives, especially those that have been in the business for decades. How do I describe it? Putting their head in the sand. They're they're putting their head down and saying, well, it'll be fine. We'll just do what we can and maybe when I come up from the sand later, people will want to work again, or there will be a recession where people are afraid to lose their job and they'll be working harder and things like that.

And it's like they just want to sweep it under the rug or want it to go away. And I'll tell you, it's not. And, and some organizations, okay, here's your your friend Cara, who's going to tell it to you real. Some organizations are letting and expecting their rock star workaholics to just fill the gap of the inefficient org chart or ineffective org chart.

I mean, that's what's happening. Sometimes they just let people and then ultimately them too. And they think that, you know, the companies think, well, we're paying well, but compared to other industries, appeared to work in 60 or 70 hours a week. I'm not sure there's very many of us keeping up with that level. If it's a true a player rock star, right, that would be considered a rock star somewhere else as well.

In fact, I wanted to share a different perspective with you. And that is I try to stay on social media in a way that I get to see what young people are seeing, and I like and follow, you know, all these career coaches on TikTok that are telling young people how to negotiate and how to get more benefits and things like that.

And I saw a great meme the other day on social that said, okay, you ready for this? It's a new boss. Your refusal to hire enough people is not a reason for me to work late. Okay, I have to say that again, this this meme said, hey boss, your refusal to hire enough people is not a reason for me to work late.

And what they were saying, they specifically use that word refer refusal is because the company's trying to stay lean. And all these people were commenting on these memes. I've seen several like this. They comment, comment and go, yeah, I shouldn't have to work harder because my teammate didn't show up. That's not a problem. That's the company's problem. And so they really are pushing it back to the company and saying this is not okay.

15:21 - 20:41

Cara Silletto

They're getting all this advice from social and from their other friends. And I have to admit to some extent I agree with their perspective. I mean, I, I believe in professionalism and work ethic

in, in somewhat of a traditional sense that we need to show up and do our jobs. And that's how our organization operates and makes money and things like that.

But we also need to understand that we're hiring this person to do a 36 to 40 hour a week job with a team beside them. That's what we've promised, right? As an employer, we're saying we'd like to offer you this job. It is for most people, a 36 to 40 hour a week job, and you will have this team to help you.

But then we just keep asking them to fill in and to go above and beyond when other people don't show up or we need more hours out of them, or we've put so much on their plates that they can't do it in 40 hours, so it takes 50 or 60. In fact, a year or so ago, I remember being on a call with an executive and he said, well, I only want to hire somebody who understands this job is a 60 plus hour a week job.

And when I looked at what he was planning to pay, I said person for 60 hours a week. I had to have a conversation about the disconnect there that that you can't afford that level of commitment and that level of of workaholic type person. Four pretty standard. Hey, that's not going to happen. So a lot of the workforce, though, we kind of got away with pushing people to do more because we had this workforce that was raised on the mantra because I said so, that's why.

And and they didn't push back, especially the Gen Xers got love. Yeah. Because Gen Xers were so much smaller than the boomers that they they did what the boomers told them to do. But let's face the reality here. Today's new workforce is way less tolerant of being overworked and understaffed for very long. They are not going to stay till the job gets done, because they know they've now seen from around them and from their friends, and even in their own experience, it's never done.

I mean, come on, health care is 24 over seven 365. And even if we're working on projects, they never end. So many people are telling me they no longer see the light at the end of that stress tunnel. And it's really sad. So we're losing some really great people from senior care altogether because we can't get our act together and figure this out.

Right. So what do we do about it, man? Cara, you've been on your soapbox for a while now. Are you going to you going to give us some strategies and thoughts on that? Yes, yes I am. So I've got some clients in the space making some big changes and and a prediction that I have now is that the senior care organizations who get this new org chart right, who figure out what that sustainable model looks like, are going to be the ones that win the talent battle and end up providing the greatest quality care, right?

Especially as we move to different pay models, value based care and other things like that. We've got to make sure that everything aligns with how we're getting paid for, the care that we're giving, and being able to also hit the highest quality care metrics as well. And it's going to take continuity of staff, which means less turnover in order to get there.

So now some folks are doing this. I got to tell you, by throwing money at those top leaders, at administrators or DONs, they are giving huge bonuses. Okay? I'm like, I'm blown away at what I've learned this past year about some huge bonuses that some organizations within our space are giving. If the administrator and the Don or whoever this top leadership team is that's deemed bonus worthy, they have to hit certain financial metrics, quality metrics, staffing metrics.

But what I see with most of the groups I work with is most companies cannot afford to pay these huge bonuses and top dollar to get so-called rock stars in that position. And I'm not saying that most administrators are not rock stars. They are. I mean, we have so many that are great, but they are not given what they need to be as successful as possible as far as time and tools and training and all those things.

So let's talk about some different approaches we can take. If we are not one of those companies that's throwing big, giant checks at people for stabilizing the staffing and figuring that out pretty much on their own, too, that's what's happening. Some of these folks are being told you're in charge, you're the CEO of your building. You fix it and then we'll pay you for fixing it.

You know, almost like consultant level type of strategy. So that's not what I see at most organizations. So for anybody who's watched more and more responsibilities land on leaders plates, I want to ask, when was the last time you pruned your job descriptions, right, that you reviewed and recalibrated? And we all know what pruning your rose bushes is.

You have to take things off at the end of the season so that the next year the the better flowers can bloom and they don't weigh down or get, you know, that too heavy or start wilting and things like that. So pruning pulling back in an area is really important for being able to future blossom. Right? To be able to really be even better next year, next month, next quarter.

20:41 - 27:51

Cara Silletto

So I'm going to give some examples of what I'm seeing happen and also what happened. Like how did we get here. One of those is that across business in America we've eliminated this kind of middle management type of position. And I'll give you a non senior care example. My mom was an accountant for for decades. And she was what was called a front line leader at this corporate group.

So she had I believe it was six staff accountants that reported to her. And of course she had a boss she could go to with issues. But her job as the front line leader, she had maybe 20% of the workload that her staff accountants had because her job as the front line leader was to fill in. If you take six people and they each have two weeks of vacation, that's 12 weeks that she has to cover doing other people's jobs every year, not to mention the sick time or other other things like a maternity leave or paternity leave or, you know, things like that when people are out, she had to fill in.

Plus she had to be at meetings that they didn't have to go to, so she couldn't have as much workload on her plate for that. And she was there to troubleshoot and handle issues of those six people, when they couldn't solve a problem, they came to her. So she did about 20% of the same work they did. She's in meetings.

She's covering PTO time. She's there for troubleshooting. That was her job. Well, this organization decided we don't need frontline leaders anymore. We're just going to cut that position and so they cut all the frontline leaders in various departments. And you know what happened? Their turnover started going up, up, up, up. Because then the staff had to fill in for each other.

They're all pulling a 40 hour a week. But if their next door to meet is on vacation, they have to work extra. And they, you know, felt that's not fair. We used to have the cushion for this position. So I think that's another thing from the 80s, 90s and into the 2000 that we kind of normalize these flatter hierarchies.

We got rid of some of our assistant manager and assistant director positions trying to be more lean, but now it's come back to haunt us because the staff today are more needy. They need more manager time and attention and onboarding and training and mentoring. So it's kind of working against us to have that flat org chart. And so I'm seeing more of those positions be put back in.

In fact, one group I'm working with in Chicago, they've added a new position called the clinical Operations Manager because they realized they have a in and an aide to you, right, an assistant director of nursing. They have both positions, but they are still overloaded with staff issues, scheduling problems and changes, regulatory changes and different things. So they're they're adding a new operations role for the clinical team that's going to take on the scheduling and much more of that administrative and operational headache that our Dons have.

Just piling up on them. So that's a new role for them. And they're hoping also that that that makes the Don and admin role more attractive next time they have to hunger for it. They say, well guess what? RDA enrolled doesn't have to deal with those things. So that's kind of a longer term strategy they're putting in play there.

And they're also adding an HR assistant who their HR team because they just don't have enough hands. And most HR teams honestly are not not really fully staffed as I would recommend with as many staff issues and and initiatives that we need going on for retention today. So another position within the HR realm in particular is we have been encouraging organizations for years to create a retention specialist role or a retention strategist or a retention director, whatever level you want to put that at.

And if you go to magnetvault.com, the resources that we have there is a sample job description of what would a retention specialist or director look like? Some of my senior care clients have made a regional retention director position, and some are putting one in every building or two

because come on, if retention is really our top issue that we're dealing with right now, we got to put our money where our mouth is and have a true owner of who is going to revamp the job descriptions, who is going to improve onboarding, who is going to train the leaders to be better retention champions?

Right. There's all these projects that should be going on. But right now we don't have anybody owning those. So lots of options there. And speaking of kind of the the swollen job description and and the neediness of today's new workforce, I'm speaking at a conference coming up in a few weeks, and it's invitation only for senior care executives.

But I've been interviewing administrators for this conference, and I'm going to share my insights there. Now, I can't share too much right now, but but I have got one nugget for you that I was really shocked by. And when I asked these administrators the question of how much time do you spend talking directly to staff and or dealing with staff issues?

Not just like filling positions, but like drama and problems that staff have? And I got to tell you, all but one administrator, every single one of them except one. All but one said they spend more than 50% of their time dealing with staff issues or working with staff one on one, and I think that is a big wake up call for us, that the one line item on an administrator or a deal wins.

Job description. There's one line item that usually says, like, you know, employee engagement or support your staff or, you know, however, is defined at one job description line item has now swollen to become first of the job. Are you kidding me? The best time for that right now. On on a later episode this year on Bridge the Gap, I'm going to dive into more about Gen Z and how especially the younger workforce is bringing their whole self to work.

They do not leave their personal drama at the door as previous generations were taught to do. But what I'm going to discuss right now is kind of this evolution of the workforce. What that means for leaders, and what it means is we have to be prepared to spend more time on the floor. We're going to have to as as leaders in our buildings, and especially if you are even at the home office or corporate office, getting back on the floor more often because the leaders in the buildings have to spend more one on one time with staff, they're going to have to work more on mentoring both their their staff and everybody on their team,

but also mentoring the department heads on how to deal with staff concerns as well. I'm seeing a request on on our end for a lot more training around that. How do we coach with care? How do we understand our people better? You know, generational dynamics and empathy plus accountability, those types of things. So we got a lot more need on the floor.

27:51 - 33:35

Cara Silletto

And that's impacting the the job descriptions as well. Now the here's the thing of those administrators that I interviewed. Remember, one of them said that he did not spend 50% of his time with staff. But later in the discussion, he went on to tell me that he spends a ton of time,

you know, relative. But he said he spends a ton of time and effort developing his department heads and directors so that they can deal with the problems and they don't have to bring the problems to him.

So he's kind of delegated that. It doesn't mean that his building doesn't have the same drama and doesn't have the same problems. It's just that he has equipped, purposefully, intentionally equipped the next level down of leaders to keep that off his plate. But that right there takes extra time to really pour into those leaders and help them navigate those situations and learn how to do it better moving forward.

So I'll tell you what adjustment we've made in a lot of our programs is, you know, we can't fix the workload. So so we've said in our training programs, what can we fix or what can we help the leaders do better in a more effective way if they've got a rotten org chart that they can't change? And so we've focused a lot of our class time now on still shifting the mindset of those leaders.

How can they just think more proactively, more regularly, more intentionally, more effectively as a retention champion in every interaction they have and just throughout their day? How can we shift their mindset to think about it more, because they don't have time to do a lot of the actions, but they can think about it and just change their communication and their their slightly change their behavior throughout the day.

If they're thinking more about it and then when we get to the strategies of every one of our, whether it's a keynote workshop, a retreat, whatever it is, when we get to the strategies, here's what we have. We've had to kind of pare back everything to is micro strategies. We've had to take everything we teach about team building and trust building and communication effectiveness and all these different areas.

You know, how to give feedback and everything we teach. We've had to say, how can you do it in 30s or less? You know, we're not asking people to mentor and take their mentor to lunch or mentees to lunch. We're saying, how can you micro mentor with every interaction you have with your team? How do you build it into your daily stand up meeting or your huddles, your shift change meeting, things like that.

So. So now we're shifting to this micro, micro mentoring, micro training, micro team building those behavior change strategies that can really stick, you know, because I can't tell an administrator, oh, well, you need to go have lunch with your mentees once a month or that's not going to happen. And especially not like at the nurse level, they're not going to be able to take CNAs out and and take them under their wing in that way.

So it's got to be done. More on the floor, more on the fly as well. So hopefully the the org chart adjustments, ideas that I've shared are helpful. Shifting to instead of big behavior change that we would often ask for coming out of a training program, shifting our expectations as organizational leaders to more of this micro strategy, and smaller adjustments and mindset shifts in our leaders that can stack and bring great impact over time.

But I hope that this conversation has been helpful for you. I do not mean for this episode to be so disheartening, because I know we're kind of felt the cards were dealt. We have to deal with that. I don't I don't mean to bring you down, but if you're frustrated and you're still listening, thank you. Thanks for sticking around because it's so important to have these honest conversations, and also to now discuss the long standing sacred cows.

I can't tell you how many organizations are finally having conversations around the way they've always done it, that they finally realize is not flying anymore. It's not going to work. So if we're going to find solutions, we've got to have harder conversations and more honesty about what is it that's really not working so that we can attack it and get it right?

So what if we do if we're in a situation where we can't change the org charts, we can't touch the job descriptions or help the workload on our team? Or maybe you're saying we are working on it, Cara, it's just slow. We're trying to get there. But another thing, besides offering the micro strategies, I would also say if you know your team is underwater most of the time, please keep your priorities intact.

Please try not to overload your folks. You know, another whole segment of the employee retention ecosystem is about setting appropriate priorities. Not too many, not too few, so that your leaders workloads don't get out of whack in the first place. But I don't have time for that one today, so we'll cover that in a future discussion here. And until then, if you want to keep learning more retention strategies right now or until my next episode, and if you want to, just let me know your thoughts on today's hard hitting topic.

This episode, I'm sure, has ruffled a few feathers. I'm sorry, but we got to get real, right? So if you want to reach out to me or get other tips and tricks throughout the month, connect with me on LinkedIn. I'm the only Cara Silletto out there. Pretty easy to find, and you can also check out more videos about retention on our YouTube page at youtube.com/magnetculture I'm Cara Silletto and thanks for listening to this week's Bridge the Gap contributor Wednesday.