Ghosting in the Workplace

"Ghosting" is a term that is being used more frequently. It is defined as cutting off all communication with someone without warning and without explanation. Many people feel victimized when being on the receiving end of this practice. The person being "ghosted" sometimes feels abandoned or insulted. The term may have originated with dating behavior, where one partner ends a relationship suddenly by ignoring all attempts to maintain contact.

Employers have concerns about the growing trend of candidates who don't show up for scheduled interviews, don't arrive on the first day of work, or even quit without giving notice. Some employees are quitting their jobs by walking out without saying a word. This trend is becoming known as "ghosting" in the workplace.

What Causes Ghosting? Some individuals seek to avoid conflict or are highly stressed by unpleasant conversations. Instead of confronting the issue and discussing their concerns, they may feel more comfortable leaving and avoiding any further communication as a method to resolve that conflict. Sometimes in the workplace, ghosting could be the result of receiving what is perceived as a better offer, receiving a counteroffer from their prior employer, hearing negatives about the new employer, or even deciding the new role is not a good match. Their circumstances and thoughts about the new company can change after applying or even after accepting a job offer. They see ghosting as an easy way out, rather than having to apologize, explain or have a disagreement. The trend may be influenced by social media, where email and texting are replacing traditional communication methods, such as phone calls and personal meetings.

HR Professionals are seeing a trend in the job market where historically low unemployment is giving candidates more options and more leverage in negotiating with employers about job opportunities. Employees have more options for employment and can move quickly from one job to the next, ignore employment offers they choose not to accept or accept multiple offers at once with little perceived

negative consequences. This has led to increased costs to employers for recruiting, onboarding and training.

What can employers do differently? There are several strategies that can help minimize the negative effects of ghosting:

- **Pre-Boarding:** Onboarding should start immediately after a candidate accepts your offer. This can be called "Pre-Boarding". Having ongoing communication with new hires is essential to give them a positive impression of your organization, and start assimilating them into their role and into your culture as soon as possible. Some employers mention the possibility of other offers to the candidate. Taking that proactive approach helps prepare the new hire to handle aggressive contacts from competitors. Even prior to their first day, call or text the new hire with welcoming messages and share other positive aspects of your organization to reinforce their decision to accept the new position.
- **Onboarding:** When the new hire arrives for their first day, be sure they are personally introduced to their coworkers and designate a point of contact who will be readily available to answer questions. From the 1st day of training, maintain contact and give guidance and encouragement. Many new hires leave during the 1st month so ongoing communication is essential to avoid turnover.
- **Internal Development:** It is important to build long-term relationships with existing employees, and plan for their growth within your talent pool.   Keep lines of communication open to obtain feedback from each employee, but also explore opportunities for their advancement. Remember that the type of person who may use Ghosting may be the type who is hesitant to share feedback unless they are made to feel very comfortable about the process.
- **Networking in the Community:** It is ideal to have a network of contacts in your field and to maintain relationships with talented individuals, regardless of whether or not they are looking to make a career change immediately. Social media can be a great way to do this. When you do recruit someone from your network, they already have a relationship with you and are less likely to Ghost.

Ghosting is likely to continue. Employers should adjust to this trend by understanding its causes and taking some steps to adjust. You can reduce the chance that your business will be the victim of ghosting.