

Lucas: Welcome to Bridge The Gap podcast, the senior living podcast with Josh and Lucas. Another exciting show today. We have the one and only Cara Silletto back on the program. She is the Chief Retention Officer at Magnet Culture. She is an author and just an all around amazing person. Welcome back to the show.

Cara: Thanks so much. I'm glad to be here.

Lucas: Well, Cara, you have a lot going on in your world recently and you were talking to us before we hit record and you're like, I've been hustling and that doesn't surprise me at all. And I know a lot of our listeners have heard you on the show before, and you've worked with a lot of our listeners and the people in the senior living industry. And I don't think anybody's surprised by that. So talk to us about the new things that have happened in your world and the things that you're working on right now.

Cara: Oh, sure. Thanks. So you may know me from Crescendo Strategies, which was our company for almost eight years and this summer we rebranded to Magnet Culture because we focus on reducing employee turnover. And we really felt like the magnet represented that a lot better to really show people that we're trying to attract and keep people versus repel people, which is what we don't want to do. So big project on the rebrand this summer. And then we also built, of course, a virtual studio in our office so that we can do more virtual training, virtual keynotes, those types of things. And then we took our live and in-person workforce retention bootcamp and we put that into an online course. So now that's a six hour certification program that certifies folks as retention champions. If folks want to get their managers or HR folks certified on that. So that's been really exciting recording all of that, building it out and launching a lot of those products. And we became woman-owned, certified officially. We've always been women owned, but we did go through WBENC to get that official kind of seal of approval type of thing. So, yeah.

Josh: Well that is so awesome. And it has been probably at least a year. It's hard to believe that much time has passed since you've been on our show and so much has changed in the world. So let's dive right into kind of the topics of today and talk about strategies for becoming a place where people actually want to work. So can you just walk us into this and maybe even update us— Has any of what you're talking with people with the challenges, has that changed? Have strategies changed?

Cara: Yeah, it's interesting because everyone asks me if I can do training that's COVID relevant or COVID specific and what's kind of funny is the things that we've been teaching for years, they are the exact same strategies people should be implementing now and yet now it's even more important. So things like communicating your expectations because people can't read your mind, right? Really training up your managers and supervisors. Those folks that lead your frontline caregivers and others, they have the most influence on whether someone stays or goes. And so providing the training, coaching, mentoring to those folks. And I totally understand that we are super busy, completely overwhelmed right now with everything, but the moment that you forget the fundamentals of being a good communicator and a good leader, that's when things can fall apart and you see people just walk away because they feel forgotten or disconnected or other things.

So yeah, management training and just management effectiveness is huge. The onboarding process? Still huge. We talked about that I think on our last podcast together very specific things that you can do to make your onboarding more enjoyable so it's just not terrible. Nobody wants that. And also the team building aspect of that, you can't expect new hires to just come in and be a part of the team without knowing who these people are. So those types of things.

We also really feel like each organization and even each location in many cases should have someone who is a dedicated retention champion. A dedicated retention specialist that focuses on that. It's really easy for us to say, oh, well we need another recruiter because we've got so many applications and so much time processing all of these candidates. But in reality, the problem is not necessarily the people you're bringing in, the problem is that everyone's exiting. And so if you can dedicate someone at least a half a person, if not a full person to the retention initiatives of gathering the right kind of data, training up the managers, revamping the onboarding, you know, all those things. If they can kind of own those processes, those are a lot of the management and retention strategies that we're talking about. We were talking about it before. COVID and we're still talking about it now, maybe in a little bit different way, but overall it's the same thing.

Josh: So Cara, do you ever find when you're talking about retention and helping to train and equip and lead communities and their leadership teams to focus on, do you ever find that you have to dig in and help them on the front end where maybe they are hiring a lot of people that maybe they weren't communicating effectively on what they were getting into? You touched on communication and expectations. Do you find that sometimes in the onboarding process and even in, before that the recruitment hiring that we just get so caught up in the rat race of bringing people in that we first get to kind of lay the foundation?

Cara: Sure. so I try to, when someone immediately comes to me and says, we need to hire better people, can you fix that? You know, can you bring us higher quality candidates? The first thing I'm going to say is, well, why are they leaving? Because if you, if you're pointing to other people and saying, they're the problem, right? I do a lot of generational work. So I hear those dang millennials. Like it was fine until they showed up. Right. If you're pointing your finger at not great candidates or not great pool, if you've already done the internal work and the homework to become a great place to work and to create great managers that people want to work for, then good job. And we can look at that. But you can get a lot more bang for your buck addressing the actual retention problems.

With that said, yes, we do look at the selection process, how you get those applicants in. I mean, the best companies that I see in this space, they start their job descriptions with: Want to make a difference? They talk about what draws in people and do you want to work for an organization that matters to people and that, you know, saves lives and provides great quality care. They're selling the organization from a very marketing-esque standpoint. Instead of just saying, I need people that meet these qualifications. You do have to be attractive and draw in those people.

We are a big fan of using hiring assessments, nothing expensive, but basic hiring assessments are really good. If they're used properly, you should never use— what are they— like personality assessments should never be used to weed out and say, oh, well, they didn't pass that test that assessment. So they're, they're not even going to get an interview. But if you use proper assessments in the right way, they can be great screening tools.

And then there are ways to do better recruiting as far as partnering with schools, partnering with other organizations, but really being a great place to work. I hate to circle back around, over and over. It's like being a great place to work makes you that magnet that's going to attract better people. And then your workers tell their friends, their family, they tell their friends and their family, oh, I'd to work there instead of, instead of it being like, oh yeah, don't go apply there. And you, you do want to be upfront too. You can't lie to them. You have to give realistic job previews, good job descriptions and things like that as well.

Josh: So Cara, if our listeners want to bake the cake, right, the better place to work cake, what would be a few of the key ingredients, regardless of all the icing and all the decorations and all those things, but what is going to make that the best cake and what are people saying about what they want in a workplace? You get to talk to a lot of people, so what are some of those common themes that you're hearing?

Cara: People want flexibility. They want empathetic leaders. Some people think that's fluffy. It's not fluffy. It is somebody who really understands that I am a 24/7 person. I'm a mom whose kids' school was shut down. I mean, if that didn't recap back on all working parents' lives, I don't know what else did. So if you don't understand what I'm doing in the morning before I come in to work for you and how I'm leaving that day, what I'm leaving to go deal with and handle maybe even as a single parent or somebody who's struggling financially or somebody who's, you know, someone is sick in their family or whatever, or I'm sick. We have a lot of mental health, mental health issues that are underlying for a lot of folks that a manager may not even know that person is struggling with those things. So I really think that the workforce today is looking for managers that listen, managers that care, that give a crap about their people truly, that understand one size doesn't fit all.

And so being fair is not about everything is equal. Well, I treat everyone the same way because that's fair. When someone is a single parent and someone is not, and this person has more support systems maybe, and this person has very little, then I may have to support that person or give them more flexibility on their scheduling and things like that. So they're really looking for that flexibility, that empathy, just great leaders it's. So comes down to whether or not my supervisor, my manager, my DON, all the way up the chain, right, not just your direct supervisor, but all the way up the chain, do they get it or are they disconnected? Which is a big problem I see today that the frontline is completely disconnected from the management and above. They live in different worlds.

Josh: So curious because, you know, I think I've seen that too. And why do you think that is? What's the number one reason for that disconnect? Did I stump? Did I stump, Cara?

Cara: No. well, yeah, sort of, but I'm trying to like lump it into one thing. I think a lot of it comes down to access. It's kind of a haves versus have-nots conversation if we want to talk big picture here. So if you think about today, dealing with COVID right now, we have, what's called the K economy that's happening. So you have some businesses totally thriving in this space, right? Amazon, I mean, all of the delivery services are exploding. All the big box stores are exploding, have record growth, you know, record demand, things like that. And then you're seeing the other end, right? The K economy, you're seeing the other side of businesses: struggling businesses, tanking businesses, closing, that type of thing. And a lot of it has to do with either the industry that you're in and, or the region and the state, what is your state doing? How quickly are you opening, and things like that?

So what I meant by that when I said access is a lot of times people who have education, people who have money they also have access to more: a bigger network, they have access to more opportunities. They have access to loans if they get themselves into financial trouble, they can get that money. When you talk about our frontline workers and a lot of our caregivers, our dietary aids, a lot of folks that are lower wage workers, they don't have access to those things. They may not have access to the support system. I mean, when you look at the schools shutting down, I mean, I work from home. We made it work, but what did all the caregivers do? They couldn't, I mean, whether it was an RN with a degree or a CNA, right? They all had to be at work. You can't do nursing from home in most situations.

But just in general, hourly workers had it much tougher this year and still have it much tougher this year with access, financials, the fear of COVID and being able to protect themselves in some cases. So that's where I think a lot of the disconnect comes from is management and above often feels like we'll just fix it. We'll just deal with it. We'll just call in your support network and get some help. Have your grandma watch your kids or something like that. And then it's like, but I don't have that or I can't do that, or I don't have access to that. So I think that's been a really big part of the disconnect. But just one piece of it.

Josh: Sure. It makes a lot of sense. So do you think, I mean, obviously there's a broad and diverse workforce specifically in senior housing— How does the different generations of our workforce play into all of this?

Cara: That's huge. So I've been doing generational work for eight years now. I happen to be one of the oldest millennials and have spent tons and tons of time working with leaders to understand what are those differences? What differences really matter versus which ones are just stereotypes or whatnot? But if you think about what changed in our society every decade, that's why we have generational differences because things evolve over time. And so flexibility, for example, it used to just be that you give them their schedule. Here's your schedule, work it. And my cousin who's older than me, I remember that she was only able to come to our Christmas party every other year, because she was a nurse at a hospital and she had to work Christmas one year and Christmas Eve the next year. And we always did our family Christmas on Christmas Eve.

So she only came every other year. Well now are you kidding me? The younger nurses are going, no, my family does Christmas Eve. I need Christmas Eve off. I'm not working Christmas Eve. And so they will maybe trade with someone else, but I've seen people quit because they did not get the holidays off that they demanded instead of just putting work first. And so we've seen this evolution over time. Part of it came from companies took advantage of the older workers who were just grateful to have a job. And I'm so lucky to be here and they put food on my table and I need to be grateful for that. And now, I mean, even with COVID, still in most industries, everyone's hiring, especially lower wage workers that can hop around from food service to retail, to senior housing, those types of things.

So that is a really big— it impacts the industry, the market and allows them to still have choices I can leave and go somewhere else. So I think those demands while a lot of people who've been in the workforce longer, think that's crazy. They're just entitled. It's like, no, I saw my mom get the raw end of that deal, where she had to work all these late nights and work all these holidays. And then she got blindsided with a layoff. And then she told me, do not do that, do not stay late. If they're not paying you do not give your life to this company. If you're not happy you get out. So it was really different upbringing because the 80s and 90s and 2000s brought a lot more flexibility, a lot more layoffs in corporate America, not so much in the senior care senior living space, but certainly our parents who were in different industries faced a lot of that and they raised us differently to just look out for ourselves.

Josh: It makes a lot of sense. So switching gears here just a little bit, as you can imagine, over the last six or eight months Lucas and I have had a lot of conversations about senior living on a lot of different topics. Because of all the changes that have been going on, there's a lot of things happening in senior living where it kind of feels like a pressure cooker, right?

But with this, we've also been talking about forecasting. What are some of the positive things that we see coming out of this? And we've talked about everything from technology to different practices and how this has really forced everyone in all industries, but especially senior living, out of our comfort zone. And we've talked about even from a marketing and telling our stories how we've had to get more equipped with being able to do things virtually, what do you think the impacts could be potentially from a positive perspective when we are really put into this pressure cooker situation, as we have been as, as how I put it, what do you think as we're being refined, so to speak and what do you think positively might come out on the other side?

Cara: Yeah, I think we're seeing the true colors of a lot of organizations and cultures of who really cares about their people, even more so than the bottom line. Of course we have to make sure we have a healthy bottom line to keep our buildings open and keep jobs and things but I do think you're seeing just some gems come out of the woodwork on this, of who's really doing it very, very well, taking such great care of their people.

I also think that what has happened in the last six months is really just an expedited version of the evolution that was coming for a lot of things. Now I get it. Regulations are crazy changing still and whatnot. But I mean, from what you said, the technology side, flexibility, I saw more and more buildings giving their staff flexibility on schedules and whatnot. And then when the schools shut down, they had to

even the buildings that didn't typically give options and flexibility, it was well, okay, fine. Or letting some of their staff work from home, right. Of course not the caregiver side, but the activity director or other folks, certainly corporate regional staff and more administrative type roles. We saw that expedited and they just leaped right over those barriers that they had before, you know, well, you can't work from home because we don't have the cybersecurity or you don't have a laptop or, oh, I don't know if you'll be working or not, right? Whatever the excuse is, where are those barriers? We got over those really fast in many cases. And I saw that coming that wasn't like not here and then here, all of a sudden, I think it just expedited those types of things.

So I think that's a good thing that's coming out of it as we got a little farther, a little faster and having done a lot of work outside of senior care and senior living and I still do. I still do that on purpose so I can bring best practices from other industries into the space, but having seen that, we all kind of know and agree. I think we've talked about before that a lot of times in this space, we are 5 to 10 years behind, you know, on some technology and changes and evolving. So I think this could be really good for us to kind of jumpstart us up to a little bit closer to where we needed to be in.

Lucas: So you sparked a question about working from home. Obviously the entire globe is now. That seems to be at the top of the conversations in career and workforce, how has that shifted everything? I mean, are people tired of it? Are people loving it? Is there a mixed reaction? I know that there's still a big question mark. When are people going to go back into the offices? Are people ever going to go back in the offices? We've heard these big tech companies that basically said, no, we never need to come back here. That sort of a thing, it's just, everything is shifted Cara, what's happening?

Cara: So you hit the nail on the head when you said, is it a mix? And yes, the answer I believe moving forward is all of the above. You have some organizations and organizational leaders who believe everyone needs to be there and see people and collaborate in that face to face way. And then you have other organizations that are saying, you know what? I don't ever need to see your face except on Zoom. So you can work from wherever you want, if you want to move or anything like that. So that's kind of the spectrum. And of course you have organizations in between that are going to do the hybrid type of thing.

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ut we also have a workforce that has that same spectrum. I know some people that they will never work from home again. As soon as they are allowed to get a job where they can go in somewhere, they are not doing this. It does not work for me. And then I see other people that say, I am never going back into an office again, this is wonderful. No commute, flexibility, work in my PJ's, whatever it is that they love that. And then you've got a lot of people again in the middle that would like to have a hybrid. They want to see people when they want to see people and have an office to go to, but also have that flexibility.

I do think we're going to see a ton of companies giving those options for flexibility. And in this space, mark my word, we are going to see for maybe not the first time, but a huge wave of even lower skilled workers wanting to work from home if they get a taste of that. Because if you think about retail, food service, senior care, those have to be done on site. But a neighbor of mine is a call center rep and she does not have a degree. And she has bounced into different departments of different industries, even

different types of jobs,, but always been at a lower wage in that type of job where she can shift industries quickly. And they gave her the computer and the headset and sent her home and she's loving it. So she's thinking I am never going back out where I have to get all dressed up and go be somewhere every day. So that's going to be a new piece of our competitive package. And I don't expect you to figure out how to make CNAs able to work from home, but just be prepared for that as a question, or just one of our continued challenges that people are going to say, do I have flexibility? And at what positions and what levels can we do that in our space?

Lucas: Yeah. So it sounds like that the, maybe the future really is a pretty dynamic hybrid sort of solution and probably given each case scenario.

One thing that I've heard from the marketplace, and I'd love to get your insights on this is, all of the junior workers that are coming into these industries in these fields from very diverse backgrounds, but let's just focus on a couple of them like finance or like law, these industries that are pretty complicated where these junior people or entry level workers are coming in and the experience that they gained from being in the office, hearing the phone calls from more of the executives and the senior higher up people that kind of like bouncing, getting a quick question answered that seems to be lost right now. Where do you think the results or the ramifications of that leads us?

Cara: Yeah. So again, that's access, right? It goes back to who gets to hear that phone call and who doesn't. So I proactively will have some of my staff join me on calls sometimes even as a fly on the wall. That I'll have them. Maybe I shouldn't say this out loud, but sometimes I have them on speaker phone on my phone while I'm doing the Zoom call, but it's really just, they're just learning. They're just observing and listening in to how I handle that phone call, or maybe I'll have them on Zoom and my client on the phone on speaker kind of thing, because I recognized that that was a huge part of my mentorship and growth as a young professional was listening to the guys phone calls across the hall for me, having that interaction.

So I proactively try to fill in that void with extra mentoring and whatnot. But I do think especially for those younger or junior, newer staff, as you call them, I think they need to take that in their own hands and ask, how can I listen in on your stuff? Or maybe they have some recorded Zoom calls that I could just listen to things like that, or can they be invited to some of the calls to help build their network and build those skills? I definitely think that managers across all industries really have to be cognizant of not letting those folks fall through the cracks. But luckily the younger workers tend to be more vocal and like, hey, hey, can I, can I do that? Not all of them we certainly have introverts and extroverts in every generation, but a lot of the younger workers are more vocal in getting what they want or at least asking for what they want. So I encourage people to do that for sure.

Josh: Well, gosh, there's so much here. We could talk for days to Cara. Cara you've developed some amazing resources through the years and still developing those. And now taking a lot of those resources, virtual. You were talking to us before the show started about your bootcamp and things like that. You also have a book out and I think you're going to actually do a giveaway today. Is that right?

Cara: Yeah, absolutely. I'm going to give five lucky winners a free copy of "Staying Power: Why Your Employees Leave and How to Keep Them Longer."

Lucas: Awesome. Well, we'll make sure that we let our listeners know we'll put that in the show notes and we'll give some extra credit to those people that want to engage with us. What a great conversation we've had today, Cara, thank you so much.

Cara: Yeah. Thank you guys. It's great to be back. Good to see you again.

Lucas: Absolutely great to see you, even though we're not in person, but it's still great to see you and interact and thank you for bringing your energy and your insights to today's show

Cara: Aw, thanks. All right.

Lucas: We'll put all this in the show notes and make sure that you follow us at btgvoice.com. You can access all of our past shows. You can even see Cara's past shows. I think she was on episode 16 and also episode 40, where you can go back and listen to those as well. We've got everything categorized and all the show notes and all the transcripts are on our website as well. You can connect to our social media where you can shoot us a DM or message. We'd love to connect with you. Hope everybody's having a great day and thanks for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.