Quiet Quitting – the Latest Work-Life Balance Trend

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While the COVID-19 pandemic may be in our rear-view mirror, the fallout from these past few years continues to change how we work and think about our careers.

Worker shortages, stimulus packages, work-from-home, stress and burnout, and The Great Resignation (a term that refers to the months between April 2021 and April 2022 when over 70 million people quit their jobs) – are just a few of the challenges disrupting our workforce over the past few years.

This brings us to "Quiet Quitting," a new term coined by Gen Z to describe a recent workplace trend redefining work-life balance.

What is Quiet Quitting

Some employees want to limit their workloads, doing only what is required and nothing more. This behavior, labeled "Quiet Quitting," is the new title for doing the bare minimum at work. People engaged in Quiet Quitting are not actually quitting their jobs, but they are leaving the idea of going above and beyond what's required in the job description.

They no longer want to be a part of the "hustle culture," where work consumes much of someone's personal time–where one's career becomes their lifestyle and a top priority.

In the hustle culture, one's work often exceeds the traditional 40-hour workweek, where overworking is the only path to success and the best way to earn the respect of others.

As many in the workforce report feeling stressed, overworked, and burnt out, Quiet Quitting resonates strongly with Gen Z and Millennial knowledge workers fighting to rewrite workplace rules.

Quiet Quitting on TikTok

The term Quiet Quitting first exploded as TikTok user zaidleppelin said in a July post with over 3 million views:

> *"You're not outright quitting your job, but you're quitting the idea of going above and beyond," he says. "You're still performing your duties, but you're no longer subscribing to the hustle culture mentality that work has to be your life. Your worth as a person is not defined by your labor."*

Today, TikTok videos tagged with the hashtag #quietquitting have received over 39 million collective views. Users are making videos about how they are starting to actually "act their wage" instead of doing extra work with nothing to show for it.

Quite Quitting and Burnout

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, burnout is defined as physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion, accompanied by decreased motivation, lowered performance, and negative attitudes towards oneself and others. Burnout also happens when your work-life balance gets out of sync. This has been a common occurrence in the last few years, with the rise in remote work and technology permeating our daily lives.

Quiet Quitting might be a strategy to help employees ward off burnout. As a result of the pandemic, the work-from-home workplace creates exhausting work patterns, increased workloads, and a feeling of isolation. Remote work results in people working longer hours and not setting proper limits, leading to workdays with no discernible beginning, eventually leading to burnout and disengagement from the organization.

> *"Quiet Quitting speaks to the tired and frustrated feeling that many are experiencing on the tail end of the pandemic. People are reassessing their priorities, and social disconnection can be part of this shift."*
>
> — MICHELLE HAY, GLOBAL CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER AT SEDGWICK

Quiet Quitting and Employee Engagement

#QuiteQuitting may be the latest hashtag, but the idea is far from new. The behaviors around quiet quitting center around employee engagement and disengagement.

Gallup Research studies employee engagement and creates tools to measure engagement in the workplace. Gallup defines engaged employees as enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace.

Disengagement refers to people who withdraw themselves and display effortless performance. Disengaged employees show up to work and do their job but contribute only the minimum required. Disengaged employees psychologically detach from their work by putting in the time, not energy or passion.

Today employee engagement is in significant decline. Gallop recently reported that after a steady 10-year climb in employee engagement, 2021 brought a sudden engagement drop, and the slump continued into 2022.

From unclear expectations to the lack of connection to the organization's purpose, employee engagement is trending down, and the result is Quiet Quitting.

Is Quiet Quitting Really New

The short answer is, *no.*

While the term "Quiet Quitting" was just recently coined by disenchanted Gen Z employees, checking out of your job due to stress, burnout, or just feeling overworked and under-appreciated is nothing new.

Don't believe me... go back and watch the iconic movie Office Space (1999), a comedy that follows Peter Gibbons, a burnt-out software engineer working at Initech, a generic IT company, whose life is transformed when he decides to fully check out from his career.

Or even the much darker 1999 cult film, Fight Club, which touches on the emotional trauma that can result from working a job that feels meaningless.

Call it what you will... coasting, checking out, short-timer, lame duck, slacker, or even quiet quitting,

the reality is people have been doing this for years – and it is generally a sign that company/employee expectations are no longer aligned.

How Do Companies Combat the Quiet Quitting Trend

Companies looking to combat the Quiet Quitting trend need to work on increasing employee engagement within their organization. These organizations must work to create environments where people feel supported, respected, valued, and heard.

Here are a few ways organizations can reverse the Quiet Quitting trend:

Respect Boundaries

One of the by-products of the COVID pandemic was a massive increase in people working from home. As a result, the line between work and personal time became even more blurry than ever before.

When managers don't respect their employee's personal time, sending text messages and emails during evenings and weekends, it can create anxiety and a feeling of always being on call.

Let your employees know it's not only ok but encouraged to enjoy uninterrupted time away from work to decompress with friends and family.

Show Authentic Appreciation

While one of the big talking points around Quite Quitting is not to go over and beyond without monetary compensation, the truth is, it's never just about money.

Simply put, people want to feel appreciated. No one wants to spend most of their life performing tasks day in and day out, all while never being recognized for the value they bring. Yet sadly, this is the reality for much of our current workforce.

There's an old expression, "*people don't quit companies; they quit bosses.*"

Organizations that want to combat Quit Quitting need to prioritize management training that builds authentic relationships with their team. When employees feel seen and valued, they reengage and become more invested in the organization's overall success.

Discuss Growth Plan

While not every employee will be cut out for a career in management, that is not an excuse for ignoring their career development. When employees do not feel like there is any path for

their career growth, they check out.

But let's be clear, not every employee will have the same career ambitions or timeline for growth. Some may even be at a point in their life where they don't want additional work responsibilities. And there are different ways to "grow your career" aside from a leadership role. The best way to understand all the factors that impact your employee's vision for their future is to have a conversation.

Set Clear Expectations

Many Quiet Quitters state that the reason they checked out was due to the fact that they felt taken advantage of. "*I never signed up for all this*," they say.

Managers may see the additional responsibilities as an opportunity for growth, yet the quiet quitter feels like additional tasks are being forced upon them without any prior discussion.

While organizations are trying to adapt to the rapid change they are facing, job responsibilities and expectations can't be a moving target. Changes to a job description need to be formally discussed and agreed to.

Bottom Line on Quite Quitting

Employees want to be compensated for additional time and work, as the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates occupational burnout and mental health issues. The ball is squarely in the court of employers, managers, and executives.

Allowing for an appropriate level of work-life balance, valuing employees' physical and mental health, and making employees aware of career growth opportunities, proper compensation, and good benefits are all areas that can put a stop to quiet quitting.

Employees are a company's most valuable asset and should be treated as such. It is essential that companies help employees feel valued, needed, and appreciated by leadership to improve happiness at work, increasing work-life balance.

If you want to learn how Gen Z is changing the workplace, my last article is on The 7 Exciting Ways Gen Z Is Changing the Workplace.

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MEET

Karen McCullough

Whether exploring the process of change, leading across the generations, promoting a culture of engagement, or growing confidence through mastery, On-Stage or On-Line, Karen's programs will make you think, make you laugh, and spark a positive change!

> Everybody at Southwest is still talking about Karen and the marvelous job she did! Her Generations program created such impact here and helped reinforce the power of inclusion. It mirrored our strong culture that has People at its core. Thanks again for a job well done, Karen!
>
> *LIJI THOMAS, SENIOR MANAGER DIVERSITY & INCLUSION | SOUTHWEST AIRLINES*

As a former retailer and branding expert, I have always had a passion for understanding what drives and motivates employees and customers. To be successful in retail, it is critical that you know how to hire, manage, and sell across all generational boundaries.

When I began speaking in 2001, those early years in retail became the foundation of my mission to help people and organizations embrace generational diversity by providing honest solutions helping bridge the generational gaps and encouraging better understanding and cooperation in their workplace.

Today I creatively blend relevant content, current research, engaging humor, and compelling stories to deliver actionable ideas through my keynote and speaking programs. I will make you think, make you laugh, and will spark a lasting positive change in your organization!

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