



QUIET QUITTING - SELF-EMPOWERMENT OR SELF-DESTRUCTION?

Hot on the heels of the Great Resignation there has been a surge of interest around the concept of 'quiet quitting'. Rather than changing their employment, people are changing their engagement with work. For some, it is a novel term for their feelings of disengagement, a rationale for opting out and a socially acceptable reason for doing the bare minimum. For others, quiet quitting is an empowering, constructive shift that can boost productivity and impact in role and well-being in life.

The contagious nature of the phrase 'quiet quitting' reflects the collision of distinct but related workplace changes. Rising reports of burnout due to disruption and uncertainty, growing desire for meaningful work, and shifting employee expectations for their organisations to see them as 'humans' not workers, are coming together to alter our desired relationship with work.

The fusion of living with post-pandemic uncertainty, economic volatility and adjusting to remote or return to the office is wearing people down. There is a lot of anger, frustration and exhaustion. Why not take it out on your organisation by resigning or quietly quitting? However, our relationship with work is like the relationships we have in other parts of our lives. If we decide the fault lies with the other party, we neglect to see what is in our power to change. And if we focus on what is in our control to change, we are more likely to get our needs, desires and hopes met.

The original sentiment of quiet quitting was to no longer keep doing 'more and more' work. To not get caught up in the hustle culture of equating being busy to being successful. If you apply this working definition of quiet quitting, the shift in mindset can be an empowering move if your focus is on these 3 reasons:

1 TURN YOUR 'TO-DO' LIST UPSIDE DOWN

The cult of busyness found a new playground when remote or hybrid working created blurry boundaries. People embraced the newfound flexibilities, but work-life integration without some demarcation quickly slides into work pervading all of our waking hours. With work time no longer defined by office hours, it is easy for there to be scope creep, and we are hearing of people feeling the need to look busy across all hours of the day. Pausing to think about the type of work you spend your time on in terms of potential outcomes and impact, rather than activity itself, is a helpful way to disrupt your growing 'to-do' lists. Use purpose as a filter - think beyond your own deliverables – to consider what your team, unit or function is trying to achieve.

2 UNDERSTAND BURNOUT IS NOT A HEROIC ACT

Statistics indicate that burnout is on the rise. Continuing to say yes to additional work or added responsibilities without taking stock of what is possible will undoubtedly lead to burnout. Leaders asking for new or broader sets of deliverables may not fully grasp existing workloads if that individual is working

some or all of their days remotely. Or the individual may still be spending time on an activity that is no longer a priority but hasn't had that conversation with their leader. Being resilient is not about putting your head down and powering through – it's about managing physical, mental and emotional energy and resources and channelling them to the right areas.

3 FIND PURPOSE IN YOUR FLEXIBILITY

The pandemic caused people to reassess what is important in their lives, but reassessing hasn't always led to new habits or making time for what matters. Quitting the need to 'always be on' is empowering if you refocus some of that time on what matters to you – whether that be a personal interest, relationships, or time to rest. You will be a more engaged, productive person at work if you invest in other areas of your life.

However, many people have gravitated to quiet quitting for different reasons - to either represent their feelings of disengagement in the workplace or as a socially acceptable reason to do the bare minimum. Doing the bare minimum is what social scientists have long termed presenteeism and is not new. A new label, however, can make the choice feel empowering. A media frenzy can make it feel like we are part of something bigger – we are tribal animals at heart, influenced more by others behaviour than we care to admit.

If a colleague has embraced quiet quitting and doing the bare minimum because they are no longer enjoying the job, the team they are in, or the organisation they joined, they are choosing a response that is taking power away from themselves, despite wanting to do the exact opposite. Showing up to work disengaged or dodging work under the radar of remote working might feel good in the short term, but it will rob that individual of the opportunities to grow, develop and have meaningful connections with other humans. These are all well researched sources of well-being and life satisfaction.

Quiet quitters risk making a choice that is veiled as 'I'm doing what's right for me', when in fact they are making a decision that limits their access to fundamental sources of well-being. We lose sight of what is in our control. We may feel organisations are making us take on more or asking something that is unrealistic – but if we avoid having that conversation with our leader, we make a decision that reinforces what we perceive is out of our control rather than bringing it into our control.

For leaders who are recognising a shift in their people's behaviour, taking the time to understand what is going on for that individual is important. Make sure you are not jumping to assumptions, especially if a lot of the work is remote. Simple coaching questions leaders can ask are: On a scale of 1-10, how motivated are you feeling in your role right now? What are you finding motivating or rewarding? What would move that number up 1 or 2 notches?

Rather than feeling like this is something 'new' to get your head around as a leader, another issue to add to the growing 'load' of leadership responsibilities, it comes back to all the things we know are important to people in the workplace.

MEANING AND BELONGING

Take a moment to connect your people's efforts to the impact of their work on the team, customers or other stakeholders and the flow through to business impact.

PROACTIVE RESILIENCE

Leaders have a role to play in modelling and supporting individuals to manage their resilience resources in the way that makes most sense to them. Many people who are working remotely are not using the flexibility of working at home to proactively manage their energy and use the lost commute time to do something positive for themselves.

GROWTH THROUGH NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Work is a source of learning, skill development, knowledge expansion and exposure to new and different ideas. Work with your team to ensure their deliverables provide new opportunities to learn.

The notion of quiet quitting is likely to linger for some time. It has the potential to be positively motivated and rewarding for both the individual and the organisation. Quitting the idea that work has to define your life can unlock many positives by channelling time into the activities or tasks that have the greatest impact and/or managing your energy levels and ensuring you are dedicating time to things that re-energise you physically and mentally. It's up to you whether you turn feelings of misalignment or symptoms of burnout into positive changes for yourself or your team.

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