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OUR FRESH THINKING

**Do you really want to hear what quiet
quitters are saying out loud?**



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In July 2022, a revolutionary movement was born – but this time not on the elegantly paved streets of New York nor with the energetic crowds of Alabama.

The movement was born on TikTok with hashtags for placards and reposts for protesting crowds.

Quiet Quitting, it is called!

Launched by Zaid Khan, a young engineer in New York, his TikTok video on Quiet Quitting resoundingly resonated with today's workforce, snowballing into a global phenomenon.

At the very heart of Quiet Quitting is disenchantment with excessive encroachment of meaningless work into personal life.

As Zaid put it in Quiet Quitting, “you're quitting the idea of going above and beyond. You're no longer subscribing to the hustle-culture mentality that work has to be your life.”

This is to say; people want to own the work they do instead of the work owning them.

Racking up millions of views and exuberantly springing to the top of the HR headache list, quiet quitting is steadily, if not rapidly, becoming a thing!

What does this mean for employers? *Employees are leaving without leaving!*

But wait, how did we get here?

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHT

Statistics confirm that promotions from within boost employees' morale, keep them engaged, and lead to longer employment tenure.

Don't underestimate the power of listening to your employees, as this significantly impacts their performance and job satisfaction. Employees who feel heard are 4.6 times more likely to perform their best work.

Managers who resist adopting modern technologies and progressive work environments are more likely to produce quiet quitters in their obsolete work environments. The best employees want to be part of innovative movements.

Work environments where employees are not allowed to be problem-solvers and innovators will not produce overachieving employees. They will reduce their performance levels to meet the confidence level that managers show in them. Quiet quitters are common in these restrictive environments.



...about two-thirds of 1,200 professionals prefer to get a promotion with no salary increase than a salary increase with no promotion!

The Great Resignation sets the wheels of change rolling in corporate America

The architecture of today's business space – historically built on the hustle culture – is facing a radical overhaul.

Before now, employees were unofficially required to sacrifice every ounce of their lives on the altars of career advancement.

The ethicality of such sacrifices was a discussion employers were too eager to sweep under the carpets and gloss over as “hustle”.

Clothed in corporate imperialism, employers were kings screaming orders at paid captives (employees) with no flake of regard for what employees felt.

But it appears things are changing – no thanks to the critical paradigm shifts that escorted the pandemic.

The Great Resignation of 2021, which saw an unprecedented 47 million people voluntarily quit their jobs in the United States, showed that today's workers, as much as they desire competitive salaries, are becoming increasingly interested in meaningful work.

More notably, employees are becoming more courageous to call it quits if they are not as psychologically (relating to engagement and job satisfaction) as they are financially remunerated when working with you.

And those who don't want to quit loudly with a resignation letter are quitting quietly by doing the barest minimum of their job demands.

Coasting, you may call it if you prefer the modest version.

The quiet quitting movement is growing at epidemic aggression. Interesting statistics from

Gallup reveal that over 50% of American workers are quiet quitters!

How interesting – or frightening (depending on the side of the fence you are)!

But what actually is the crux of quiet quitting?

For the conservative employer – used to holding all the aces in the labor market – the revolutionary idea of quiet quitting reeks of employee rebelliousness overdosed with laziness.

“This rebellion must be nipped in the bud,” such employers scream in their fine tuxedos overlooking their exotic cups of coffee.

But should you be very worried about quiet quitting?

The answer to this is largely subjective. For me, not really.

Yes, quiet quitting is raging like the 2020-grade COVID-19 pandemic that caught the world off guard. But there is a notable difference between these two pandemics.

COVID-19 was less discriminatory and infected just anyone. But quiet quitting has shown a unique (and relieving) selectiveness for infecting disengaged employees.

Yes, quiet quitters have been founded to be actively disengaged employees.

According to Jim Harter, chief scientist for Gallup's workplace and well-being research, upon analyzing quiet quitters, Gallup found that they closely mirror a class of “disengaged employees who will show up to work and do the minimum required but not much else”.

Therefore, we can argue that quiet quitting is a patrilineal cousin of employee disengagement

from one grandfather: poor management.

Quiet quitting feeds on the amplified dissatisfaction with work among today’s employees. Statistics reveal that the ratio of engaged employees to actively disengaged fell in the second quarter of 2022 from 1.8 to 1.

For context, this is the lowest we have recorded in the last ten years.

But what have managers done to cure this malaise? They orthopedically manipulated the bone of contention, shifting the blame for quiet quitting from poor management to lack of employee monitoring.

The rise of employee monitoring technology in the face of quiet quitting

With quiet quitting slashing employee productivity, many managers are chasing employee monitoring tools, electronically breathing down their employees’ necks.

An interesting New York Times survey reveals that “eight of the ten largest private U.S. employers track the productivity metrics of individual workers, many in real-time.”

Such profusion in the adoption of digital monitoring software has seen over 70% of American businesses, at one point, tracking the online activity of their employees, according to figures from Express VPN.

Furthermore, 73% of these employers go on to record employee calls, storing their messages and emails.

Sarcastically, while such NSA-style surveillance may work in identifying quiet quitting, it does so little in solving it – except taking the nuclear option of sacking the employee.

A more sustainable and less invasive approach would be solving the subterranean factors behind quiet quitting. This strongly relates to improving management and providing impactful leadership to disengaged employees.

Sounds excessively theoretical?



According to Forbes, employees who feel their voice is heard are 4.6 times more likely to feel empowered to perform their best work.

Well, I have successfully led global teams for over two decades – even maintaining progressive relationships (till this day) with people I was opportune to lead 20 years ago.

Notably, I led an abundantly culturally diverse team with 22 different nationalities, and employee unproductivity (a sister of quiet quitting) was never an issue.

How did I achieve this?

6.5 ways to solve quiet quitting in today’s workplace

As I established earlier, filling in for a paucity of meaningful leadership with employee monitoring tools is wasteful.

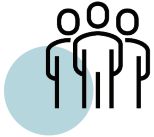
Today’s employers and managers need to do better in building workplaces optimized to their employees’ psychological, cultural, and intellectual calibrations.

This would furnish such employees with work environments conducive to maximal (unforced) delivery, boosting engagement and productivity.

1. Management must prioritize employee growth

I have focused on growing my subordinates in all the teams I have led and not entirely for philanthropy.

I have discovered that progressive companies are a synchronized fraternity of progressive individuals. Leadership must see employee growth



Quiet quitters would be better motivated when they see their managers in the frontline sweating it out with them.

as dietary essentiality for their growth, not a threat.

This explains why I strategically provide a symbiotic work atmosphere for my subordinates and the company to simultaneously feed on the same table.

Yes, it is about creating win-win partnerships where the employee grows while growing the company.

Encourage internal hiring and promotions where you can. Such growth means a lot to employees.

An interesting Korn Ferry study revealed that about two-thirds (63%) of 1,200 professionals prefer to get a promotion with no salary increase than a salary increase with no promotion!

On the flip side, 21% of employees have quit loudly (in terms of resignation), according to SHRM, when they feel they lack career advancement opportunities in their current positions.

Quiet quitting is prominent where there is unilateral growth – especially on the company’s side at the employees’ expense.

Companies can’t monopolize growth and expect intelligent employees to commit. The company’s balance sheets can’t be swelling in financial health while the employee’s professional and psychological health shrivels.

LinkedIn Learning’s 2021 Workplace Learning Report revealed that employees at companies with high internal mobility (demonstrated in internal hiring and promotion) typically stay almost twice as long as employees at companies with low internal mobility.

Similarly, employees who move into new roles internally are also 3.5 times more likely to be engaged.

Employee engagement is tied to the levels of growth they anticipate with you.

Employees won’t have to keep their career eggs in more than one basket (typical of quiet quitters) if your company provides a sufficiently voluminous and safe basket for them in terms of upward growth opportunities.

2. Managers must listen more

As business leaders, we often feel we have earned the privilege to “retire our ears” when at work. We want to do more of the talking and so little of the listening.

Exclusively downward vertical (from boss to subordinates) doesn’t work anymore in today’s work environment. Unavoidably, an employee’s sense of being heard enormously affects their job satisfaction.

According to Forbes, employees who feel their voice is heard are 4.6 times more likely to feel empowered to perform their best work.

A large bulk of my success as a leader can be attributed to my conscious listening efforts when collaborating with subordinates.

I understand employees are not just biological order dumps on whom you only hurl instructions.

Being intelligent creatures, your employees are opinionated. And the least you can do is to hear them out occasionally.

Note that hearing their opinions doesn’t automatically oblige you to adopt these opinions.

The minimum you can do as a progressive leader is to encourage a sense of belonging in your subordinates by establishing upward-flowing channels where employee perspective passes from the frontline to senior management.

It’s not always going to be straight linear listening; it can be horizontal, diagonally, or without a defined pattern.



Employees savor the dopamine rush of solving problems in their unique way.

3. Managers must stay fresh

We live in a highly dynamic world. There are few quicker ways to mentally alienate your best hands than insisting on 19th-century protocols and systems in today's workspace.

I am a strong proponent of *objective progressiveness* in leadership.

This means that managers must be open to adapting systems to the prevailing dynamics of their industry instead of a sentimental or dogmatic attachment to systems solely because those systems worked well in the past.

Deliberately stay updated on the relevant evolutions in your space.

The world changes really fast, and leaders must be progressive enough to lead or adopt structural and technological evolutions in work. In my opinion, managers should sentimentally connect more to results than systems.

The best employees want to work in progressive work environments that are at the forefront of innovation or adoption.

Employees quietly quit when they feel the work environment you present is laden with obsolescence.

You definitely don't want to be the old-school manager rummaging through piles of file cabinets when digitized storage systems have become mainstream.

4. Aggressively equip your employees to strive for their best versions

While researching for this piece, I spoke with many quiet quitting proponents.

Interestingly, a sizable percentage revealed that they feel morally justified to coast through their jobs (providing the bare minimum the job requires) because their employers have not sufficiently equipped them to deliver better.

Before criminalizing the quiet quitters in your workspace, do a bit of objective introspection to see if you have equipped them reasonably with the professional infrastructure they need for superior delivery.

How vigorously are you training employees?

Workplaces with aggressive employee development entrenched in their work culture are robustly vaccinated against quiet quitting.

A LinkedIn's 2018 Workforce Learning Report found that 93% of respondents would remain at a company longer if it invested in their career.

Employees with a leadership committed to keeping them updated with the latest innovations or technologies in their space are rarely disengaged – and they rarely quit either (whether loudly or quietly).

Professional development is even more critical to Millennials. According to a Gallup survey, 87% of millennials consider development in a job important.

5. Managers must be visible

Simply showing up in a nice piece of suit at work as a leader is not the visibility I refer to here. Quiet quitters often lack visible leadership, especially psychologically.

How well are you showing up when employees need you? Are you leading from the front?

Transformational leadership, where the leader rolls up his sleeves and stays in the trenches with his employees, has proven far more successful than transactional leadership, where superiors aristocratically bellow orders from far-above executive perches.

Quiet quitters would be better motivated when they see their managers in the frontline sweating it out with them.



By prioritizing employee satisfaction and representation early on, managers can effectively prevent employee disengagement culminating in quiet or loud quitting.

Also, from my experience in leadership, I strive to present myself concurrently as a leader as much as a coach.

As keen as I am on professional excellence, I yet retain the empathy to consider the emotional well-being of my subordinates.

I call it the 21st-century-3D-leadership. This full spectrum, well-rounded leadership approach caters to your subordinates' professional, intellectual, and emotional needs.

This enables you to resonate with your employees at stratospheric frequencies far above the traditional boss-to-employee realms.

I have retained the friendship of people I led 20 years ago because I treated them as humans before being subordinates.

While being relentlessly intolerant to mediocrity, people who worked under me can vouch that I treated them with dignity and earned their trust as a genuinely interested superior and advisor.

6. Encourage autonomy where possible

Quiet quitting is common where employees work in highly restrictive environments and are malnourished of autonomy.

Employees find no problem coasting where the job reduces them to oxygen-breathing robots following textbook orders verbatim with little to zero space for innovation.

It goes without saying that autonomy is at the heart of employee engagement. Employees savor the dopamine rush of solving problems in their unique way.

Findings from Effector Research show that 79% of autonomous employees are engaged and thus are more accountable and perform better.

While having established templates for execution help, employees must not be forced to follow them to the latter.

I deliberately structure my work environment to allow my subordinates some acreage for creative maneuvers where possible.

The more employees can bring their creativity to the fore in their work, the more psychologically invested they become in such positions.

6.5. Show deliberate leadership early enough

I tend to see quiet quitting as a “metastasized cancer” of employee disengagement.

Here, employee disengagement had gone severely cancerous and spread through the team. But these could all be averted with early diagnosis and treatment. By prioritizing employee satisfaction and representation early on, managers can effectively prevent employee disengagement culminating in quiet or loud quitting.

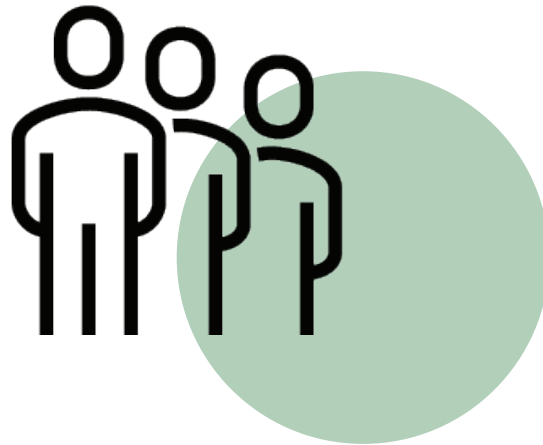
The U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh agrees on this regarding quiet quitting: “If you are an employer, you should catch on early enough that your employees aren’t satisfied, aren’t happy, and then there needs to be a dialogue, a conversation.”

In situations where you detect employee disengagement and have exhausted all diplomatic channels for re-engaging such employees, you must show strong leadership and act decisively before the team gets the message that coasting through their job is allowed.

Final Thoughts

While TikTok may have illuminated the quiet quitter movement, employees who have felt underappreciated and like they were just at a job rather than part of a productive team have sandbagged their performance since the modern work environment began. Quiet quitters, comprised of practically every other employee, as Gallup reported, evolve from disengaged employees. Monitoring employees' communications and online activity, authoritative and out-of-touch management styles, and other efforts to force productivity where morale is missing have only further silenced the potential of the all-star employees. These employees are not only needed to be in business but also to build bench strength.

Active, attentive leadership builds relationships with employees and hears their voices, literally. When employees see you as a leader rather than a boss, they are willing to do more. This is because leaders influence the team. Therefore, employees see leaders as part of the group, but view bosses as outsiders of the group, controlling it. Nobody wants to be controlled, but people don't mind being led when they see the result of effective leadership and how it benefits them. Listening, caring, and interacting with your team is not only the best way to hear what quiet quitters are saying, but also the best way to keep them engaged – the antibody of quiet quitters.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Michael D. Brown is a Global management expert, and award-winning author of *Fresh Passion: Get a Brand or Die a Generic*, *Fresh Customer Service®: Treat the Employee as #1 and the Customer as #2 and You Will Get Customers for Life*, and *Fresh Passion Leadership: Become a Distinct, Branded Leader or Extinct Generic*.

Michael is a sought-after speaker and thought leader on the topics of *Talent & Human Capital Strategies*, *Competitive Customer Experience*, *Laser Focus Personal Branding*, and *Profitable & Sustainable Business Growth*.

Leveraging his track record of delivering competitive commercial results, developing and executing competitive talent & human capital strategies, Michael continues to partner with organizations eager to leverage top-tier talent for transformative growth and results. Together, these partnerships lead to the Unlocking and Unleashing of World-Class Talent, enabling the achievement of ultimate potential for the individual and organization.



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