

# QUIET QUITTING

## Four Strategies to Correct the Course

BY MICHELLE BUSH

As “quiet quitting” is discussed in the mainstream, managers need to figure out new, intentional ways to engage burned-out employees.

The TikTok-inspired “quiet quitting” philosophy describes a trend in which disengaged and burned-out employees actively reject the “hustle culture” by setting stringent boundaries in the employee-employer relationship and doing the least amount required. The 2022 trend follows not far behind the COVID-19 pandemic-driven Great Resignation, with companies laying people off in droves and shifting others to remote work.

The pandemic brought with it uncertainty and unpredictability on a global scale. Many companies were devastated, and almost all experienced unprecedented upheaval as they scrambled to adapt to a new reality. Hard choices had to be made to keep moving forward. One could not ignore daily reports of rising COVID-19 numbers juxtaposed with companies floundering and job losses. Job insecurity became the norm for millions of people.

Even as the pandemic flared, employees who remained on the job were asked to accept extra responsibilities—or thought they needed to overperform to hang on to their jobs. In the remote workforce, people were disconnected from daily interactions

and camaraderie and often any unifying sense of purpose other than weathering the storm. Working remotely led to blurred boundaries between their home and work. Given the isolation and insecurity, people felt alienated and stressed, a recipe for burnout.

As the economy rebounded, with now record low unemployment, employers are scrambling to retain and compete for qualified employees. Heightened job security allowed people to take a pause to reassess their approach to work and life. At the same time, the trend of quiet quitting has hit unprecedented levels. According to a Gallup poll in September, quiet quitters comprise more than half of the U.S. workforce.

Quiet quitting should serve as a wake-up call to organizations and frontline managers, who can make or break the employee experience—as the adage goes, “Employees don’t quit companies, they quit managers.” A manager knows who on their team will go the extra mile and who will not. They may believe they are already doing all they can to boost morale and foster



productivity. If they are not seeing the desired results, they need to keep looking for better ways to mitigate quiet quitting. Here are four strategies to consider:

## 1 PAY PEOPLE WHAT THEY ARE WORTH

One underlying assumption behind quiet quitting is that employers expect more work out of people than they are willing to compensate for. By definition, work is about exchanging your life energy for compensation. Financial gain—including salary, benefits, bonus structure, and advancement opportunities—plays a major role in attracting prospective candidates and retaining quality employees. In fact, money ranks among top priorities in deciding whether to accept or leave a job.

Do not overlook the obvious. People want to be paid what they are worth for the job they perform. In a competitive job market, employers must bring their best offer to the table and be willing to negotiate or they will risk losing a viable candidate. By the same token, existing employees need to be able to see a path forward financially to feel incentivized. Consider publishing salary ranges for every position in the organization, so employees know they are being paid fairly and know they can aim higher by gaining new skills.

Overworking and underpaying employees can yield gains in the short term. However, doing so is not a sustainable model for most organizations. Work-life balance matters at any stage of life. Providing a healthy balance demonstrates respect for

people and helps build loyalty, so they will stay engaged—and go above and beyond when it matters the most.

## 2 IMPROVE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DE&I)

By 2025, Millennials are expected to comprise about 75% of the workforce. Millennials and younger generations value and actively seek out diverse workforces when job hunting, according to Deloitte, which noted this trend in its 2014 survey “Big Demands and High Expectations: The Deloitte Millennial Survey.”

Bernard Tynes, Forbes Councils member, wrote in his March article, “The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion for Today’s Companies,” that greater diversity in the workforce leads to happier and more satisfied customers and employees. “Having a diverse workforce means happier and healthier employees, customers feel more respected and managers have greater access to the talent and skillsets they need for their organizations to thrive,” stated Tynes, who is senior VP and director of marketing and data analytics, Penn Community Bank.

Conversely, businesses that do not actively seek and promote diverse talent often show a lack of representation and opportunities for women and people of color (PoC), which can alienate customers and lead to dissatisfied employees. In the 2nd Annual Vaya Vision Survey, a recently released national survey of U.S. professionals across IT, healthcare, professional services, and banking/finance, despite efforts by employers to invest in leadership development and DE&I programs, certain

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### 1 PAY PEOPLE WHAT THEY ARE WORTH

segments of employees are being left behind. The survey shows that advancement opportunity gaps continue to persist between men and counterparts who are women and PoC, and these problems can be linked to a lack of investment in their development. Women are 49% less likely than men to participate in company-sponsored leadership development programming. Additionally, women are 26% less likely to receive employer-based mentorship and coaching opportunities after training, and they are less likely to receive any follow-up support at all.

Solutions can only be found if a problem is acknowledged. The survey found that almost half (45%) of white men in the workplace believe there is equal access to training and development, while a vast majority of women, PoC, Gen Z, and younger Millennials know firsthand that's simply not true. The time for organizations to do better is now by investing in a more diverse, up-and-coming leadership team supported by development programs to advance careers. This intentional effort in supporting and developing diverse talent can enhance employee motivation—thus reducing quiet quitting—and bring the added benefit of improving team performance.

### 3 ENGAGE AND CONNECT

A high level of engagement has always been key to attracting and retaining quality employees. Managers account for at least 70% of the variance seen in employee levels of engagement, according to Austin Suellentrop and E. Beth Bauman, writing for Gallup in June 2021.



### 2 IMPROVE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DE&I)

This study alone emphasizes the importance of helping managers understand how to best engage and connect with their teams.

Managers who actively engage their employees not only keep people productive but also show they value team members as individuals. People who do not feel emotionally supported in their work environment are more prone to make errors and less likely to grow in their roles, as stated in Jon Christiansen's September 2019 *Harvard Business Review* article, "8 Things Leaders Do That Make Employees Quit."

As Gallup noted in its September survey, in this post-pandemic reality, remote Gen Z and younger Millennials cite a significant decline in feeling "cared about" and "having opportunities to develop" in their current jobs.

A paycheck shows an employee the quantitative value they bring to the company. People need qualitative validation as well. That starts with meaningful communication and active listening. "The employee experience begins and ends with the manager," said Suellentrop and Bauman.

Furthermore, establishing and communicating a powerful organization mission that touches the hearts of people makes wise business sense across the board—to attract and retain customers, partners, and employees. People who feel part of a larger mission or purpose are more likely to invest the "extra" effort than those who work for a paycheck alone.

Managers need to be willing to candidly address quiet quitting and other unproductive behaviors with their direct reports. In doing so, they should seek first to understand. Employees



### 3 ENGAGE AND CONNECT

should be routinely asked about their values related to the workplace, what they need and want in a career, and what they are unwilling and willing to do to make their goals a reality. Honest dialogue creates a safe space and opens the door to provide more individualized development opportunities to help people grow professionally.

Make a point to recognize (reward) those who go above and beyond, and those making progress. Be sure their positive efforts are acknowledged one-on-one, verbally or in writing, and to their peers in a team meeting and to higher-ups. People need to be acknowledged for what they do right. Some companies highlight a different employee every week or month. Focus recognition to highlight why their work matters and the value they bring to others. Work environments that stoke positivity create an upward force on individuals and the group and, in turn, enhance emotional connectivity.

### 4 SHOW FLEXIBILITY

The pandemic led many to reconsider how they live their lives, what they value, and what is important to them. Despite differences in the way men, women, and minority groups in the Vaya survey view their workplaces, they do agree on some priorities. They desire flexible work hours (42%), the ability to work remotely (39%), wellness benefits (39%), and advancement opportunities in the workplace (34%).

People don't necessarily want to bring their lifestyle to the office, but they want an employer to recognize that they have a life and



### 4 SHOW FLEXIBILITY

values of their own. Increasingly, job seekers are gravitating to organizations aligned with their values. Yet, with today's workforce being a mix of fully remote, in-person, and hybrid, recognizing individual priorities and values can be challenging.

Virtual training is one flexible way that employers can meet the unique needs of their employees. People no longer seek out formal weeklong training programs that take them away from their home and routines, preferring instead to engage in smaller, bite-size learning programs that can fit into their day-to-day working rhythms. Employers who embrace innovative approaches to developing employees can realize significant boosts in engagement.

As an example, gamification is a tool in leadership and development that has proven effective to combat employee apathy. A TalentLMS survey noted that in addition to boosting productivity and engagement, 83% of employees who receive gamified training feel motivated, 89% feel more productive, and 88% feel happier at work.

Although the world steadily returned to normalcy and greater predictability, there is room for us all to grow. Organizations became more resilient with a greater openness, flexibility, and willingness to adapt. Career development and investments in talent are crucial to continue that momentum. The right structures and systems, especially at the management level, can make all the difference in building a culture that values people and yield dividends to the business. [CQ](#)

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