

# Quiet quitting — what it means and what to do about it

Move over articles on The Great Resignation. There's a new buzz phrase dominating social media: "quiet quitting." But unlike the first term, coined to describe the large number of workers leaving their jobs post-pandemic, a definition for "quiet quitting" proves more challenging.

So let's start with some history. While some people claim they have been quiet quitters for years (just without giving the behavior a name), we have TikTok to thank for sparking widespread modern interest. In July 2022, a TikTok user with numerous followers posted that he recently learned about [quiet quitting](#). "You're not outright quitting your job, but you're quitting the idea of going above and beyond," he says. "You are still performing your duties, but you are no longer subscribing to the hustle culture mentality that work has to be our life."

From there, the concept took on a life of its own — and not just among his Gen Z and Millennial peers. Papers such as The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times devoted articles to the subject. And debates began on exactly who is quiet quitting, how they are doing it, and what possible professional and personal outcomes might result.

## What is quiet quitting?

Whether you peruse journalistic pieces on the subject or comments on LinkedIn and other social media platforms, you soon discover a variety of viewpoints on what it means to quiet quit. Some sample answers include:

- Setting boundaries at work and saying "no" instead of always saying "yes."
- Taking back your free time.
- Doing what you are paid for, not more.
- Untangling your worth from your job so you have more time and energy to invest elsewhere.
- Pushing back against modern workaholism.
- Performing the requirements of your job description but not taking on additional work.
- Redefining work-life balance.

- Refusing to knock yourself out for an employer who does not really care about you as anything but a worker.
- Seeking respect for your time and energy.
- Doing a job only during contracted work hours because taking on extra causes burnout or the feeling of being taken advantage of by your employer.

One thing quiet quitting typically does not mean is actually leaving the job. In this respect, it contrasts with The Great Resignation. Quiet quitters are not finding new positions, turning to gig work, retiring, or dropping out of the workforce. Rather, they stick with their position but operate under a different philosophy.

Why not just quit? While stories on The Great Resignation make it sound like everyone has all these new job options, that is not totally true. Factors such as education level, skills, geography, familial obligations, and the like do not always lend themselves to alternative jobs. Staying put but quiet quitting may seem like a better choice.

Also, many quiet quitters do not see their actions as aimed against their employer per se. Rather, they view quiet quitting as an overall shift in how they intend to perform any position with any company.

## **Signs of quiet quitting**

Wondering if you have a quiet quitter or two on your staff? Employers sometimes have trouble distinguishing quiet quitting from burnout. A key factor is whether the actions seem voluntary and intentional. Quiet quitting is a choice, whereas burnout is a result.

Possible indicators of quiet quitting include:

- Not bothering to attend optional trainings, meetings, or social events.
- Keeping communication and interaction to a bare minimum.
- Unwillingness to volunteer for extra duties or to take on challenging assignments.
- Arriving and leaving in exact accordance with scheduled work hours.
- Not answering emails, texts, or calls outside of work hours.
- Cynicism or apathy about new procedures or initiatives.
- Following directions and completing work but not generating new ideas or producing beyond basic expectations.

Don't be surprised if other staff members identify a quiet quitter before you. For the good of the team, co-

workers may feel obligated to compensate for a quiet-quitting colleague. This extra demand can lead to chatter — and resentment — about who they believe is not pulling their weight.

## Dealing with quiet quitting

For obvious reasons, quiet quitting does not sit well with most managers. Some see it as childish, passive-aggressive behavior. Others view quiet quitting as lazy, selfish, or a sign of mediocrity. At minimum, leaders may see quiet quitters as people unworthy of promotion.



An interesting thing to remember, though, is that quiet quitters are not necessarily bad employees. In fact, they may fulfill their job descriptions quite well or never have a problem producing up to par. They may just display an unwillingness to go the extra mile, stay long hours, or forfeit their personal well-being for the sake of the company. Many would simply view this as a healthy work-life balance.

A real concern for employers at this time when quiet quitting is a trending topic is that staff members will get the idea in their head. Just as The Great Resignation led to many Americans jumping on the “head out the door” bandwagon, all the talk of quiet quitting may encourage workers to try it out for themselves.

Worried managers can take various steps to create a better work culture. A few ideas include:

- **Make mental health a priority.** Respect the need for people to take breaks during the day. Encourage everyone to use their PTO to recharge and pursue outside interests. Advertise well-being initiatives. Adopt a health insurance plan that covers visits to therapists and other professionals.
- **Pay staff for extra work.** Give bonuses to top performers. Provide a stipend for those who join special committees. Edit job descriptions if necessary to account for additional duties, and raise the salary

accordingly.

- **Resist bothering people outside of business hours.** Do not send emails at all hours or call over the weekend. Create healthy boundaries. Even those who perform remote work need time to completely unplug.
- **Watch being guilty of “quiet firing.”** Some employers try to get away with providing the bare minimum in terms of pay, benefits, support, and other resources. At the same time, they pile on extra demands. They project the attitude that if you don’t like it, you can leave. Not only is this mindset especially dangerous during a time of low unemployment, it sends a bad message that sneakiness is part of the employer-employee relationship.
- **Prioritize communication.** Conduct surveys. Talk in groups or one-to-one about workloads, morale, and other subjects affecting office life. Workers who are given a voice, taken seriously, and feel valued are less likely to feel entitled to “secret” behavior.
- **Create a trusting environment.** Employees need to know that they are safe to talk with human resources or management about ways to build a healthy work-life balance. In the end, generating such an arrangement benefits both sides.

Ultimately, managers need to realize the shifting nature of the world. The pandemic and other events of the past few years have caused people to reassess their priorities. While quiet quitting will likely be replaced by a new buzzword in the coming months, the idea of redefining one’s relationship to work will remain. Smart organizations accept this new outlook and adapt.