**WHITE PAPER**

**Quiet Quitting and a Pathway to Better Work**

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What is “quiet quitting” really about (Goldberg, 2022)? Quiet quitting has been described as a person’s unwillingness to perform their job above and beyond their job description. In other words, they just do their job as hired. It has also been described as bordering on laziness—doing only the minimum. I think both descriptions miss the mark.

To me, quiet quitting is about a person’s intrinsic motivation, the type of motivation that comes from a person’s values and goals irrespective of the external rewards or even threats of punishment attached to their performance level. In this view of the phenomenon, a person has lost that drive to do more, to achieve more, to put in more time and effort than what is required. It is understandable that the concept of “quiet quitting” has emerged and entered our consciousness even though it has been there for a long time but under a different name: disengagement. Disengagement is the absence of intrinsic motivation: a person’s emotional attachment to performing at one’s best because it is personally important to do so. Work demands and productivity pressure contribute to the loss of intrinsic motivation when workers don’t have the right resources at the right time and in the right amount to meet these challenges (JD-R Model). Without the appropriate level of physical and managerial resource support and suppression of a host of productivity disruptors such as noise, interruptions, physical discomfort, unreliable technology, harassment, and inadequate work space, it is hard to avoid an emotional reaction of frustration, stress, anxiety, and potentially anger—all killers of intrinsic motivation and a disengagement trigger (Maslach & Leiter, 2022).

For many, this trigger is especially close to the surface emotionally because workers have experienced better control of their *work time* thanks to COVID by enabling them to work from home, away from in-person surveillance by their managers and from work disruptors that elongated the workday. While not entirely sufficient, resources provided to remote workers kept the wheels on the organizational wagon, allowing workers to be as productive as they were before the pandemic in a shorter total work day. A greater ability to control work time is the differentiating factor. It sets up a *new normal* for the amount of time devoted to work in order to meet performance expectations. The new contract is getting tasks done that need to be done during the *personally-adjusted* work day—no more and no less than required. Quiet quitting is an acknowledgement that the contract between workers and their employer has changed to something more sustainable, livable, and healthier; there is little interest in going back to pre-pandemic expectations of long hours, overwork, exhaustion, job strain, and illness—for the sake of the organization’s increasing expectations of greater achievements.

Why is there little acknowledgement of a changed contract? The Great Resignation signaled that the pre-pandemic contract expired. The reason workers gave for reporting their intention to quit their employers was to find a better “deal” such as better pay, better working conditions, and greater opportunities for development (Pew Research, 2022). Nonetheless, organizational leaders continue their quest to get workers back to the office and working much like they did before the pandemic (Microsoft, 2021). This sets up an interesting problem: how can managers respond to the *new needs* of their direct reports when their bosses are managing like its time to “get back to work?” (Microsoft, 2022). Thinking about healthy workplaces as a strategic benefit may be a way forward and create an opportunity to create a win-win (Banks & Witt, 2021).

Managers are being squeezed from both the top and from the bottom of their organizations to do opposite things (SHRM, 2022). Leadership wants managers to focus their direct reports on business needs that take a back burner when people work from home. For example, creativity and innovation suffered as workers went remote, removing in-person casual and out-of-professional-network conversations needed to break loose new ideas and broaden perspectives. Innovation is not problem-solving over Zoom. Business development, marketing, and customer relationship-building efforts also are difficult to do effectively virtually. Managers need workers to be in-person and to dedicate time to conduct these important duties. At the same time, workers need managers to help them solve work-related problems, develop their professional skills, manage their performance and give them frequent feedback and coaching so that they can be promoted. Workers need to take time away from tasks to reconnect with their friends and colleagues at work to cement their feeling of belonging. But, managers are workers, too, and they have the same needs as their direct reports working remotely and enjoying the ability to control *their own* work time. Activities such as being present in the workplace to coach and guide direct reports, giving them the time to socialize, providing performance management, and having one-on-ones are inconsistent with equally important activities such as managing remotely in order to focus on their own tasks and to control their time in addition to responding to their boss’ demands for greater focus on organizational outcomes such as revenue and profit through greater worker engagement and effort. This is not a winning formula for success.

To move toward a winning formula, it might be helpful to review a basic understanding of the components of performance effectiveness: Job Performance is a function of Ability times Motivation [Performance = *f*(Ability X Motivation)] . This means that *both* ability and motivation must be high for performance to be high; being high in one cannot compensate for being low in the other. HR professionals understand that the best strategy is to hire for ability and then motivate new hires every day. Leaders have forgotten during the pandemic the *motivation* component of this equation. The new contract recognizes that point: workers need to experience working conditions that enable them to regain their intrinsic motivation by satisfying their basic needs. By doing so, they can engage and apply their talents in ways that satisfies both theirs and their employer’s objectives. To determine what workers’ needs are, ask them directly and then build it. Focus especially on removing disruptors and barriers to performance. When intrinsic motivation re-emerges, so will productivity. Then workers, managers, and leaders will move in the same direction.

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