

Understanding the challenges of 'quiet quitting' in the workplace



Although the term '*quiet quitting*' was popularised earlier in 2022, aspects of quiet quitting have existed in the workplace and popular culture for much longer.

According to The *Guardian Newspaper (International Edition)* the term Quiet Quitting was coined in 2009 and is an application of the Work-to-Rule which simply means to go to work, work your contracted hours and do what is expected of you and nothing more. Despite the name, the philosophy of quiet quitting is not connected to quitting a job outright, but rather doing precisely what the job requires.

Why do they call it quiet quitting when you are actually “screaming” that you feel disengaged? It happens in most companies that your next-up-for-promotion employee suddenly withdraws from the workplace and ends up doing just enough not to get fired. This is referred to as quiet quitting. Yet, by withdrawing, the employee is telling you that things are not okay.

What are the reasons for employees displaying signs of quiet quitting?

The reason for quiet quitting can be due to a desire for change, be it a need for career advancement or lack of growth, *changes in the industry and work environment, leadership, or compensation* as well as feelings of disconnect with the workplace, burnout and ultimate job satisfaction.

The remote world of work post Covid-19 has made it challenging for organisations to ensure that employees feel a sense of belonging, feel valued, and to build trust within teams, not to mention the open communication challenges that it brought to the table. Human Resources across the world had to adapt quickly and think of new ways to involve their remote working teams to make them feel part of the team as previous ways of onboarding employees no longer suffice.

Signs of quiet quitting may include the following:

- Lack of communication
- Lack of sense of belonging
- Lack of feeling valued
- Lack of consistency
- Lack of trust

It is much harder to determine whether an employee is showing “symptoms” of quiet quitting when they are *working remotely*.

What type of “symptoms” do these employees show?

These employees would typically withdraw from everything work related, not going the extra mile with their work, not attending functions that they normally attended, not contributing to meetings, or checking in with colleagues regularly. They basically end up doing just enough not to get fired.

Another phenomenon that can contribute to quiet quitting is **burnout** in the workplace. The *World Health Organisation (WHO)* included burnout in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as an occupational phenomenon. The ICD-11 list defines burnout as follows:

Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- *feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;*
- *increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and*
- *reduced professional efficacy.*

Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.

Burnout can also be caused when an employee's workload is too much for them to handle.

A new term, namely *Mental Health First Aiders*, has also been part of the discussion post covid. You can appoint people with the necessary skills to be part of the first responders to other employees who feel they are not coping mentally at the workplace. These Mental Health First Aiders should not advise employees but instead refer them to the correct people or places should there be a need.

The Mental Health First Aiders can also be used to have discussions with employees who show signs of quiet quitting to determine whether something else is happening in their lives which contributes to their withdrawal.

Conclusion:

Organisations and their leaders should listen when an employee starts to "scream", indicating that they are disengaged from the workplace, as early intervention or identification of quiet quitting can help to re-engage the employee.

As part of our commitment to make Employee Wellness a priority at *SERR Synergy*, we have identified a small team of Mental Health First Aiders. They act as the first responders at an accident site, their role is not to treat the employees, but only to guide employees to the correct resources or professional people that will be able to assist them, depending on each case.

About the Author: Dina Korsten joined SERR Synergy in February 2020 as the HR Manager. She graduated from the University of Pretoria in 2011 with a B.Com in Human Resources and in 2018 completed her B.Com (Honours) in Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

Sources acknowledged:

<https://www.citizen.co.za/business/personal-finance/the-legal-implications-of-quiet-quitting/#:~:text=Quiet%20quitting%20is%20a%20new%20term%20that%20refers,respons>

©SERR Synergy, www.serr.co.za