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Quiet Quitting: A New Term for an Old Response…and What Managers Can Do About It

There is a new term being used in the workplace: quiet quitting. However, "quiet quitting" is a behavior that has existed since people began being employed. While a spectrum of behaviors can be labeled quiet quitting, such as those relating to motivation or unconscious actions due to burn-out, quiet quitting often refers to the person doing the minimum necessary, and often at the lowest level of acceptability, to get by without being fired. Original terms called it slacking, social loafing, mailing it in, or phoning it in (Grant).

Economist Albert Hirschman argued in his book, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States,* that there are two responses to dissatisfaction: one exits or gives voice. That is, a person either leaves the system or stays and advocates for positive change from within the system. The choice is predicated upon loyalty. However, Hirschman did not see the third alternative: neglect.

Neglect occurs when a person cannot afford to walk away and also cannot risk speaking up. Neglect is the 1984 term for quiet quitting (Grant). Neglect happens when people feel dissatisfied and lack a sense of control, voice, and any hope that things will get better. Neglect often occurs after managers break trust with their employees and they and/or the organization violate written expectations and social mores about how employees should be treated.

If employees quit quietly, the managers are most likely part of the problem. Almost always, with few exceptions, employees come to work to do a good job and contribute to their organization. They are not there to perform poorly. However, when employees have abusive bosses, meaningless tasks, and performance systems that do not reward excellence, they become disengaged and stop caring.

Managers can reverse quiet quitting with no-cost remedies that include:
- Promote work-life balance
- Provide for and act on employee feedback on an ongoing basis
- Offer employees a voice in defining their job roles, tasks, and duties
- Create a culture of learning
- Build a culture of trust and safety
- Focus on developing a good manager and employee relationship
- Respect diversity and embed good practices into your workplace culture
- Respect boundaries and be open to reevaluating expectations
- Provide employees support for mental health and self-care (Span)

People are willing to go the extra mile with respectful interaction, meaningful work, and generous pay and benefits packages. Managers need to pave the way to make that mile a smooth journey.

References:
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