Are quiet quitters disgruntled workers slacking off, or are they bravely taking their work-life balance into their own hands by not going above and beyond without fair compensation? (UBS)

Quiet quitting: The great reprioritization

Are the glory days of “hustle culture” behind us? The popularity of the “quiet quitting” TikTok trend would have us believe so. Self-proclaimed quiet quitters, which make up about half the US workforce according to Gallup, are scaling back what they’re doing at work. We take a look at what this trend means, whether employers should be concerned, and what companies can do to keep their workforce engaged.

What exactly is quiet quitting?
Americans are losing interest in their jobs. Engagement began to drop during the second half of 2021, and this coincided with a rise in job resignations, according to research conducted by Gallup.

If people were unhappy in their jobs, they felt they had better options to turn to. According to the UBS Workplace Voice report In motion: How companies can adapt to the evolving workplace conducted in March 2022, six in 10 of respondents said they felt confident they could find a new job if they wanted to. When people did leave their jobs, it was deemed the “Great Resignation.”

Instead of resigning, however, half of US workers are staying at their jobs but scaling back the amount of work they’re doing, says Gallup. They are the quiet quitters. But, are they disgruntled workers slacking off, or are they bravely taking their work-life balance into their own hands by setting boundaries and not going above and beyond the scope of their roles without fair compensation?

According to BBC News, quiet quitting is about rejecting the notion that work has to take over one’s life and that employees should do more than their job descriptions entail. They’re still performing their duties, but they are no longer subscribing to the mentality that work has to be their entire life.
At times, people may scale back what they’re doing at work as a reaction to an unsupportive company culture or poor management, says Eric Marrello, Director, UBS Business Owner Client Segment. “The pandemic has also created a greater wedge between employees and their direct managers due to work from home, and many workers were tasked with longer hours as a result of leaner workforces. And, if people weren’t compensated at the end of the year, they were less motivated to do more than was required.”

“People are stressed and burnt out,” notes Anca Ciorga, Head of Market Strategy & Engagement for Workplace Wealth Solutions at UBS. “They’re reassessing what’s important to them and some are finding that they’re less motivated by money.”

Should employers be worried?
“Quiet quitting doesn’t have to be a bad thing,” says Marrello. “It can be an opportunity for employees and their employers to refocus their priorities. Employers and business owners can acknowledge the importance of work-life balance and help their staff focus on the things that matter so they won’t feel the need to quiet quit.”

“The most important thing is trust,” he adds. “If you’re an employer hiring new people and want to retain talent, make sure you’re hiring people you can trust. They may set their own boundaries, but you can support them as long as they’re getting their work done.”

Allowing staff to work in their preferred environments is one way to support them. Employees who are unable to work where they would like to are major flight risks, according to Ciorga. “Seven in 10 said they will leave their current jobs if their work preferences don’t align with their employers’ expectations, with women (52%) more likely than men (44%) to change jobs,” she says. “We can tell from the survey that having a flexible work environment can help attract and retain female talent.”

Some companies are even letting their staff choose their own hours. Manufacturers, hotels, warehouses, and restaurants are allowing new hires to do so daily using apps, says The Wall Street Journal. They’re doing this under the assumption that offering flexible working arrangements will allow them to tap into new pools of labor and also because workers are demanding it.

Another way employers can keep their workforce engaged is by offering relevant benefits and clearly communicating what those are. Workplace benefits, like healthcare, retirement plans, and equity awards, are an important component of what people get out of the time and energy they put into their jobs. About seven in 10 companies feel their employees are highly aware of the benefits offered, according the UBS Workplace Voice survey. However, the survey found that while employees are aware of specific benefits, such as COVID-19 testing, flexible work schedules, and paid leave, they’re less aware of other benefits like childcare resources and reimbursement for home-office equipment.

“If you’re an employer and you feel like your employees are quietly quitting, you can make them a part of the company through equity awards,” states Ciorga. “Equity is an attractive benefit that makes employees feel invested. Make them a part of your success. If the company does well, employees do well. This may not be available to everyone, but there are options for private companies to make employees partial owners, too.”

The importance of checking in
Quiet quitting is more than a TikTok trend. It’s a movement away from “hustle culture” and a large scale demand for more flexibility and increased work-life balance. Employers can take steps to support their staff so they won’t feel the need to quiet quit.

On a more personal level, managers can check in with their teams more often, according to Ciorga. “You can tell when someone is checked out,” she says. “Ask what’s going on. Ask how you can help. Managers should make a conscious effort to check in with their employees. Be transparent about the ways that you’re struggling and let them know that it’s normal.”

For more on employee attitudes and behaviors towards workplace benefits, read the report In motion: How companies can adapt to the evolving workplace, which also includes action items to help companies create a more rewarding workplace.

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Main contributor: Kerry Breen