Quiet Quitting

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"Quiet quitting" has been the subject of much discussion in recent weeks, and for me, the worst aspect of this term is disengagement. Let me explain.

I've had the opportunity to engage in numerous conversations about "quiet quitting" over the past several weeks with academics, individuals from different generations and different organizations and employees from a former employer who was employee owned.

Quiet quitting is a term that started with a TikTok user a few years ago and has now amassed more than 3 million views and launched an international conversation. I've come to realize that "quiet quitting" is not about walking away from a job, but is characterized by employees who are essentially doing just enough to get by, refusing to go above and beyond at work. One of my colleagues said that it is a new term for an old concept of employee disengagement and/or some individuals having a "job" but not a career. She went on to say that this has always been the case in organizations but as a society we are being more transparent and willing to address this subject openly. Another colleague refers to it in the context of the pandemic's impact on individuals; that it's caused them to reevaluate their relationship to work and become more assertive about the boundaries of work and home and/or the number of hours that they are prepared to work.

What everyone seems to agree upon, however, is that the post COVID workplace forever changed the need for increased conversations about expectations, boundaries and overall engagement. That's one of the reasons why my former employer launched quarterly engagement surveys. One of the key actions from the first survey was the need to focus on respecting the boundaries of work and home – only urgent emails after hours and on the weekends have become the norm for most departments. We've also been very intentional about respecting people's PTO.

At my former employer, a consulting organization, putting in a productive 40-hour workweek and meeting your project and client expectations is not considered "quiet quitting". It's also not considered "quiet quitting" to reject ongoing 60-hour work weeks – an example of which came out in a recent employee performance discussion that I was copied on. What is concerning and may be a form of "quiet quitting" is when an employee is checked out and disengaged. It may mean withdrawing from their team, not feeling motivated by the work they are doing and/or staying silent and not speaking up about their needs. The last 2 ½ years has been difficult on all of our employee owners and we're all continuing to adjust to the new workplace. A cornerstone of our culture and our values is respect, engage and inspire.

The engagement surveys have helped us to understand and implement actions that we need to take. We've stepped up accountability for supervisors conducting regular performance discussions and having regular touchpoints with their team members. Whether in a formal or an informal conversation, I also encourage each of you to continue to be proactive in what's working well/ not working well to keep you engaged.

What we strive for is openness and honesty about engagement levels and what's needed from both supervisors and employees for full engagement. Our goal of employee ownership is 100% engagement. When we're all engaged, we serve our clients better and we are more aligned on purpose and grounded in meaningful work.