Shhhh: 3 Secrets Employers Can Take to Combat "Quiet Quitting"

Insights
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The kids call it "quiet quitting" – but ironically it's become a very loud social media movement among Gen Z, Millennials, and more. The term itself – which many who support the movement adamantly disagree with as a label – is actually a bit of a misnomer. No, it does not mean that your employees are quietly leaving in droves, and it has nothing to do with sound at all. Instead, "quiet quitting" is simply a movement to encourage employees to set strong boundaries with employers, rebuke "hustle culture," and reject those who tout "living to work" as a badge of honor. While the movement comes on the heels of the Great Resignation and further leaves employers grappling to adequately staff their teams, there are three key steps employers can take to prevent and combat "quiet quitting."

What is "Quiet Quitting" and How Did it Start?

Last month, TikTok user @Zaidleppelin posted a 17-second video titled "on quiet quitting" explaining:

> *I recently learned about this term called "quiet quitting" where you're not outright quitting your job, you're quitting the idea of going above and beyond. You're still performing your duties, but you're no longer subscribing to the "hustle culture" mentality that work has to be your life. The reality is it's not and your worth as a person is not defined by your labor.*

The video, which now boasts over 3.5 million views, has created quite a stir among the American workforce and beyond. Like all things social media, millions of other users have hopped on the bandwagon inspiring other employees to "act your wage."

Although the phrase recently became viral through social media, the origins of the concept seem to be rooted in an article published by Insider this past March. It was subsequently showcased by a former corporate recruiter and career coach, who encouraged employees to establish boundaries at work and posed the following to his followers: "are you someone who has quiet quit on the job?" The movement, which is spreading faster than a pesky new COVID variant, underscores the collective post-pandemic exhaustion of workers across the country.

3 Steps Employers Can Take to Prevent Quiet Quitting

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Whether you realize it or not, the quiet quitting phenomenon has either already entered your workforce or is coming to a burned-out employee near you. Although CEOs and career coaches are calling for a reframing of the quiet quitting practice as setting "bold boundaries" and unplugging after hours, the reality is that most employers don't have the time or patience for the movement to reinvent itself before it will impact your workplace.

In today's labor market, talent is scarce, hiring replacement employees is expensive, and prudent employers should equip management with the tools for handling a budding quiet quitter. Here are three steps employers can take to help avoid employees coasting through their jobs.

Step 1: Clearly Define Expectations

An employee may be driven to quietly quit when expectations are unclear. Uncertainty can cause employees to become annoyed, frustrated, and even disengaged with their jobs. To avoid this, set clearly defined expectations for your employees beyond just firm deadlines for projects. Employees need to understand what you expect from them on a general basis, as well as for their specific job duties. This means reviewing policies and procedures, updating job descriptions, and outlining specific performance expectations with metrics and attainable goals. Use expectation-setting discussions as an opportunity to get buy-in from employees and determine whether and to what extent they feel equipped to handle their job duties and assignments. Be sure to document these discussions. If expectations have already been defined and an employee is not rising to the occasion, tell them. Setting expectations serves no purpose if you do not require employees to meet them.

Step 2: Check In Early and Often

Whether your workforce is remote, hybrid, or completely in-person, it is incumbent upon employers to frequently check the pulse of their employees. Many managers may already have regularly scheduled one-on-one or team meetings with their employees, but these meetings are often focused on specific projects or tasks. If not done correctly, they can feel like micromanaging.

Employers should consider implementing other periodic touchpoints such as self-evaluations, surveys, or town halls to measure employee satisfaction. Regardless of the type of touchpoint, be sure the purpose is clear and well-defined. You can avoid the "this meeting should have been an email" complaint by being well organized with a concise agenda and asking specific and pointed questions about the employee's workload, the employee's career goals, and how the company can contribute to (or do more to help) the employee's success at the company. You can also use these check-ins to determine what the employee expects of you as an employer. Employees often want to be heard and frequent pulse checks can easily accomplish this.

Step 3: Recognize and Reward Employees

Recognizing and rewarding employees for a job well done is one of the best ways to keep them engaged and maintain (or even increase) productivity. Although most employees welcome monetary

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incentives for a job well done, a simple "thank you" or recognition program within your organization is often of minimal cost and can go a long way to boost morale. I'm not talking about an occasional pizza party or work-sponsored happy hour. Employees likely appreciate these gestures, but rarely do they move the needle to boost morale or increase productivity. Use the above touchpoints to determine what employees want and implement a recognition program with clear objectives and measurable criteria for employees to reap the rewards.

Don't let the Quiet Quitting Tail Wag the Dog

While it is important to recognize the signs of an emerging quiet quitter and take steps to prevent and address it, employers should not let the tail wag the dog. This means that you can and should require employees to perform the jobs for which they were hired and enforce the company's policies consistently.

Ignoring performance problems, sloppy work product, or laziness in the workplace can have a detrimental impact on your business and on overall employee morale. If an employee is not performing to your expectations (which, if you've followed the above steps, have already been well defined and explained to the employee), take action.

Consistently following your established policies can also help avoid discrimination claims. Don't let a general fear that your employees may actually quit overshadow your ability to enforce your policies and maintain reasonable expectations.

Conclusion

We will continue to monitor the quiet quitting movement and provide helpful tips for employers to navigate the everchanging workplace. Make sure you are subscribed to Fisher Phillips' Insight System to get the most up-to-date information. For further information, contact the author of this Insight or your Fisher Phillips attorney.

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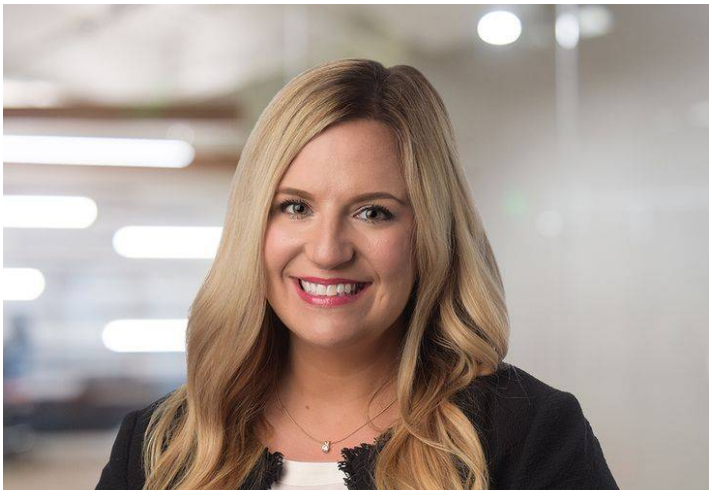

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