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Is ‘quiet quitting’ real and should founders pay attention?

People from all walks of life now turn to ‘wellness’ as a significant factor when assessing their lifestyle, one that is separate to ‘health’. As a society, our understanding of wellness has also expanded to reflect a more holistic view, covering not only physical and mental factors but now our social and work lives.

As this became more mainstream, it led to a wave of new ideas and practices, including a renaissance for remote and hybrid roles and more flexible hours. Staff want to work in the way that suits them. It’s a great thing and something that aligns with our ethos at *Vestd*.

With any big change comes new buzzwords. ‘Quiet quitting’ is the latest doing the rounds on social media and in the startup community alike. But the legitimacy of ‘quiet quitting’ is questionable.

Is quiet quitting real?

Quiet quitting has sparked hot debate. In fact, since July, searches for ‘quiet quitting’ have seen a huge surge on *Google*. On the surface, quiet quitting is just a new name for an old idea – employees doing what they are paid to do and no more. Although this doesn't seem like something that should be controversial for many, some believe that it could be the start of a catastrophe in the workplace.

Rumours around the real effects of the trend are still swirling around. Management-level staff worry that the passive-aggressive approach to working taken by those accused of quiet quitting will dramatically hit their company's bottom line.

Others argue that it's simply asserting workplace boundaries and that it's a healthy development. The more sceptical believe it's actually an agenda big businesses are pushing – that going above and beyond in a role should be a given, and that anything other than that is a form of 'quitting'.

There is some merit to the term, that by simply doing your role and no more than that, you effectively resign to staying at the level you're at, and not progressing.

Most employees will tell you that, from time to time, they're asked to do tasks outside of their job description, and maybe work overtime to get it done. By simply doing your role and no more than that, you effectively resign to staying at the level you're at, and not progressing.

But companies who regularly rely on staff going above and beyond without recognition risks making employees feel like they're being taken advantage of. In actual fact, the phenomenon might be an indicator of larger issues within company culture, rather than a person's commitment to their job.

What should founders do?

Founders need to look at quiet quitting as a litmus test of their workplace culture and employee alignment with the company instead of as an act of defiance by staff. The simplest way to prevent people from feeling disenfranchised is to nurture a positive culture.

Building a strong company culture starts right at the recruitment and interviewing stage. Be realistic about the roles advertised, and be transparent about expectations. It should come as no surprise to bosses that employees won't be happy doing lots of extra, unexpected work without incentive or reward. In a startup or scaleup environment you need plenty of appetite to win, and that needs to come from the team as a whole.

Where employee alignment is concerned, getting a team to resonate with the long term visions of a business, when they may have lost motivation, can be a struggle. A very powerful tool for startups and SMEs is sharing equity. This is a benefit that can be offered even if there isn't huge amounts of liquid cash to pour into incentives. By giving employees skin in the game, small businesses can take advantage of what we call the *Ownership Effect*.

The concept is the outcome of employees owning even a fraction of equity in a business. It's been shown that when companies do this, staff are more likely to be more productive and loyal , as well as solve problems faster and support the wider team to ensure that everyone succeeds. They do all this knowing that for their hard work they'll get a piece of the pie, and at a very good rate, with considerable tax advantages down the line. It becomes a collective effort.

Three step solution to fight 'quiet quitting'

- Adjust the hiring process. Set realistic expectations for the roles you're hiring – for both sides – and communicate those clearly.
- Respect boundaries. Allow autonomy and trust they'll get their tasks done.
- Align your team. Ensure everyone is focussed on a collaborative mission to succeed, for themselves and their colleagues.

The rise of quiet quitting ultimately comes from unsustainable working practices where treatment feels unfair. Founders who treat their staff with autonomy and respect realistically have very little to fear.

By Ifty Nasir, CEO and Founder of *Vestd.*

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