HOTBUTTON Solution

TAKING ACTION ON QUIET QUITTING

HotButton Solution,
James Lauber

What is Quiet Quitting?

The term quiet quitting is relatively new on the scene. But the problem is growing rapidly; anyone in HR can confirm this. It is seriously affecting businesses all across the marketplace. And you need to manage the phenomenon's impact on your business.

Alarmingly, a recent Gallup Poll reported that approximately 50% of the workforce is actively engaged in quiet quitting. What's even more alarming is that number is trending up.

To bring this into focus, the term quiet quitting doesn't actually refer to quitting a job. The term is used in reference to different methods of reducing productivity or the amount of work one performs. It is in fact the well known reactions to the states of worker dissatisfaction, burnout, disengagement, and generally deprioritizing work in favor of other aspects of life.

So in reality the label being used is not the issue. Whatever the label, the issue is the upward trend of the disengaged employee phenomenon. Add to that the fact that finding and retaining employees is harder than ever and you have a real concern that is affecting your organization's performance.

How Does Quiet Quitting Affect Me?

Given that the Quiet Quitting label is really a barometer of employee engagement, the question becomes; what, if anything, can be done about it? An even more fundamental question is; do you really need to do anything about it, or is it just a cost of doing business?

When the question is whether to address an issue or not the obvious place to look is at the ramifications of the issue.

In this case, four critical ramifications are;
- organizational performance is being impacted
- employee retention, satisfaction, and enthusiasm are affected
- the cost of doing business is increased
- the quality of output is decreased

The question is not if these ramifications exist as a result of what is now referred to as Quiet Quitting, the real concern is to what degree are they impacting your organization.

And the short-term impact is just the immediate concern resulting from quiet quitting, an even more concerning trend is that quiet quitting is contagious.

More and more people are unwilling to dedicate themselves to their organization's goals. Whether accurate or not, there is a growing employee perception that their organization is not demonstrating an interest in their well-being.

The result is that people are just showing up versus becoming enthusiastically engaged. Another way to put it is that people are showing up for pay versus showing up for purpose or even future potential. This, naturally, causes them to perform closer to the border of being reprimand worthy. And when they are reprimanded they are more likely than ever to leave rather than increase their performance to meet expectations.

Quiet Quitting is Contagious

Back to perhaps the greatest concern, the fact that quiet quitting is contagious and the impact this is having on your good and great employees. Why is it contagious? It's human nature. Most people have the tendency to move toward the common median behavior, or attitude, in their immediate environment. Another tendency is to avoid controversy. The natural result will be for people to notice low engagement and disruptive or disrespectful behavior and be uncomfortable confronting it. From a good and great employee perspective, this will lower their motivation and satisfaction levels. From a supervisor or manager's perspective, this will add to their stress and discomfort.

So when the question is; how does that (quiet quitting) affect me?

The effect on you, whether you're in a leadership or team member role, is the experience of being in an unhealthy environment where quiet quitting is one of the symptoms of larger issues. At the organizational level, the effect is similar to having a disease. Which, at any level, is akin to being sick. And if you're sick you seek medical advice or treatment for the root cause of the symptoms. You don't wait until the symptoms are out of control, you seek solutions as soon as possible. And if your organization is toxic (sick) then you need to take the same type of action, seek solutions as soon as possible.

How Quiet Quitting Manifests In The Workplace

Now, how do the symptoms of this trend combine and manifest in the workplace? The quiet quitters set a trend of underperforming. The symptoms of that underperformance will range from subtle to obvious and may be actions or attitudes. But however the symptoms manifest, they will certainly be noticed and will have an effect on everyone.

The management and leadership response to quiet quitting behaviors and attitudes will impact good and great employees as well as problematic ones. Good employees will gradually move towards lower engagement and great employees will be more likely to consider leaving. This is for a number of reasons, but generally, when good and great employees see poor attitude employee behavior being tolerated they will be less motivated to work harder and will resent being called on to do more to compensate for less engaged employees. And if problematic employees are managed without good soft skills then a likely result will be a more toxic environment which will affect everyone negatively.

It all adds up to a downward spiral that will affect all domains of a business. On top of the employee engagement and satisfaction issues, both customers and business partner relationships will be affected.

Pinpointing how Quiet Quitting is impacting your organization

The first step is to identify and quantify the issue. While it is possible that the quiet quitting phenomenon, or low employee engagement, is not impacting your organization, the reality is virtually guaranteed that it is. So the first step in dealing with the issue is learning how to identify it and then quantifying its impact on you and your organization.

Some identifying indicators are;
- coming in late or calling in sick
- inadequate preparation for meetings
- low participation or enthusiasm in team building
- missed deadlines
- quality issues
- lack of smiles
- an absence of group problem solving

While these are some obvious low engagement, or quiet quitting, indicators it must be noted that this is not an exhaustive list and many indicators may be much more subtle.

Some quantifying indicators are;
- employee turnover
- the speed at which new employees onboard
- the degree of feedback during reviews and meetings
- the number of complaints about co-workers or management
- participation in active problem-solving when asked

Once again, while these are some of the quantifying indicators, this is not an exhaustive list and accurate estimates are greatly enhanced by requesting direct anonymous feedback.

To assist you in getting started, here is a sample of the anonymous direct feedback "Communication Culture Census" that we use, as a trusted third party, to identify and quantify your quiet quitting risk factors and the degree of toxic disruptive influences in your unique environment. An added bonus with this census tool is that you see the difference between what management perceives and what team members perceive.

Hotbutton

Solution

Communication Culture Census

Your answers are guaranteed to be kept completely anonymous.
The census is intended to represent your first impressions, in less than 5 minutes.
Please circle the most accurate response to each of these questions/statements.

#						
1	What best describes who you are completing this census for?	Work Group	Non-Work Group	Family Group	Social Group	Yourself
2	I/We encourage collaboration and others.	Rarely	Not Often	Often	Frequently	All The Time
3	I/We share information openly to encourage the best possible results.	Rarely	Not Often	Often	Frequently	All The Time
4	How common is it to see the people around you stressed?	Very Common	Common	Occasionally	Uncommon	Not Common At All
5	Do people around you blame others when things don't go right?	All The Time	Frequently	Often	Not Often	Rarely
6	I am clear about my/the group's vision and goals.	Not Clear At All	Unclear	Marginal	Some Clarity	Very Clear
7	I/We tend to work in silos.	All The Time	Frequently	Often	Not Often	Rarely
8	Is your group open, encouraging, and supportive?	Not At All	Rarely	Occasionally	Most Of The Time	Very Much So

The next step in dealing with the quiet quitting impact on your organization is to evaluate your analysis as it compares with direct feedback and prioritize the actions and responses you need to implement to address your unique situation with your unique team(s).

While the results are always unique, the census results generally indicate that engagement is hampered because team members perceive themselves to be in a competitive environment where they are underappreciated and at risk. Conversely, management generally assumes that everyone is as motivated and engaged in the outcomes as they are.

Dealing with how Quiet Quitting is impacting your organization

One of the subtle difficulties in dealing with quiet quitting, or low engagement, is that any given person can only do the best they can with the tools they have at the time. And most people are committed to their approach because it is what got them where they are in the first place. And that is totally valid, from their perspective. However, in a group environment other people's perspectives are equally important, to them, and failing to recognize that fact creates toxic environment risk.

Organizational culture is guided in significant ways by the leadership style at the top which trickles down to have some level of impact on everyone. Here is a brief look at two very different leadership styles' effects on their respective organizations.

Case Study One

The first is a case of an organization we were engaged to help rebuilt after the fact. In this case, the company was a subsidiary of a global entity and the President was a "powerful" leader who transferred in from a different part of the world. His style included occasional outbursts of raised voice, lightly masked contempt, and demand for results regardless of operational realities. He was performance-driven and had been tasked with increasing production quality, efficiency, and profitability. He felt his approach was the best and fastest way to achieve those results. As you may well guess, when the global parent company did not see the results they had hoped for they took action, ultimately with a performance audit. Long story short, the President was returned to the head office, a new President was recruited, and we were engaged. With new and informed leadership, the company dealt with the toxic issues and was able to achieve its performance targets within a reasonable time frame.

Case Study Two

In another case, we were engaged with a local company with a visionary leader who was a co-owner. The company experienced managed growth over a number of years, had a great reputation, and showed all the signs of a vibrant and exciting place to work. At a certain point, the visionary leader sold his share to the more technical-oriented co-owner. Within two years the company had shrunk both in clients and employees.

Then a decision was made to merge with another company, with the strong personality owner of the other company taking over the leadership role of the newly merged entity. This new leader did not consider corporate culture a priority and we were dismissed. Long story short the newly merged company continued to lose market share and staff to the point where they are no longer in a position to regain their earlier success.
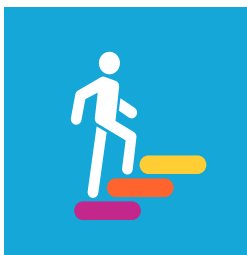
Case Studies Summary

In both of these cases, leadership had a critical impact on the organization's culture and the accompanying results. Also in both cases, our corporate communication culture focused role had an impact. In one case we had the opportunity to help rebuild a toxic culture. And in the other case, leadership chose to not address their corporate culture issues and suffered the consequences.

Solutions to Quiet Quitting

So what are some actions you can take towards finding a solution to this growing problem of employee engagement that is referred to as quiet quitting? Below you will find some resources that will certainly point you in the right direction. But what must be remembered is that all organizations are unique and are filled with unique individuals. That means there is no cookie-cutter solution to quiet quitting, or to any other business problem for that matter. Each individual organization is best served by a tailored solution. And that solution consists of action in more than one zone.

Three Quiet Quitting Action Zones

- Attention to Toxic Environment Factors
- Managing Your Unique Situation
- Take Action to Mitigate Warning Signs

The first zone is attention to toxic environment factors like;
- performance issues, individual or team
- level oꜰ enthusiasm, teamwork, and commitment
- addressing direct (words, actions), and indirect (long face, etc) incivility
- specific factors that are unique to your environment

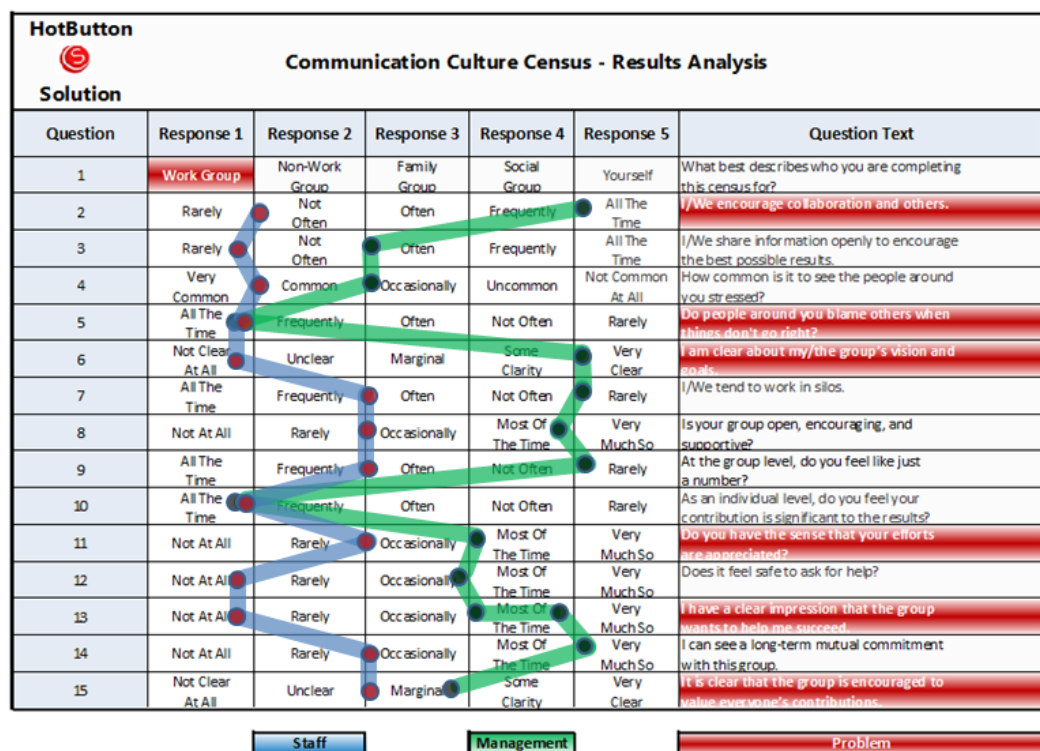The second zone is managing your unique situation by focusing on;
- what you do to express your vision and mission
- finding out what your employees are actually thinking and experiencing
- paying attention to warning signs:
    - attendance

- punctuality
- energy level
- enthusiasm
- team spirit
- on time/budget/quality
- creative problem-solving contributions

The third zone is taking action to mitigate warning signs and increase commitment by;
- learning about, focusing on, and promoting communication culture
- showing you "care" by providing training and coaching opportunities
- demonstrating concern by noticing performance or attitude issues and asking if all is well
- demonstrating leadership by addressing incivility
- regularly asking for feedback and suggestions on culture improvements

The graph below shows the "Communication Culture Census - Results Analysis" drawn from the actual results of a recent client engagement. Notice the difference between the Staff's and the Management's perspectives. Some areas of significant concern were revealed, and are highlighted in red.

HotButton Solution

Communication Culture Census - Results Analysis

Question	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5	Question Text
1	Work Group	Non-Work Group	Family Group	Social Group	Yourself	What best describes who you are completing this census for?
2	Rarely	Not Often	Often	Frequently	All The Time	I/We encourage collaboration and others.
3	Rarely	Not Often	Often	Frequently	All The Time	I/We share information openly to encourage the best possible results.
4	Very Common	Common	Occasionally	Uncommon	Not Common At All	How common is it to see the people around you stressed?
5	All The Time	Frequently	Often	Not Often	Rarely	Do people around you blame others when things don't go right?
6	Not Clear At All	Unclear	Marginal	Some Clarity	Very Clear	I am clear about my/the group's vision and goals.
7	All The Time	Frequently	Often	Not Often	Rarely	I/We tend to work in silos.
8	Not At All	Rarely	Occasionally	Most Of The Time	Very Much So	Is your group open, encouraging, and supportive?
9	All The Time	Frequently	Often	Not Often	Rarely	At the group level, do you feel like just a number?
10	All The Time	Frequently	Often	Not Often	Rarely	As an individual level, do you feel your contribution is significant to the results?
11	Not At All	Rarely	Occasionally	Most Of The Time	Very Much So	Do you have the sense that your efforts are appreciated?
12	Not At All	Rarely	Occasionally	Most Of The Time	Very Much So	Does it feel safe to ask for help?
13	Not At All	Rarely	Occasionally	Most Of The Time	Very Much So	I have a clear impression that the group wants to help me succeed.
14	Not At All	Rarely	Occasionally	Most Of The Time	Very Much So	I can see a long-term mutual commitment with this group.
15	Not Clear At All	Unclear	Marginal	Some Clarity	Very Clear	It is clear that the group is encouraged to value everyone's contributions.

Staff   Management   Problem

18

Wrapping it up

In the end, culture is a part of your organization whether you like it or not. And it impacts your ability to grow market share. Poor cultures will shed quality people and have fewer opportunities. Healthy cultures will attract quality people and maximize opportunities.

Take the example of Steve Jobs when he was recruiting John Scully away from Pepsi in order to apply his marketing skills to the personal computer market. Steve Jobs sealed the deal with his legendary pitch: "Do you want to sell sugared water for the rest of your life? Or do you want to join us and change the world?".

The basis for organizational culture is communication culture. Not only does communication culture exist, but it is also the driving force behind leadership and the single most influential element affecting your organizational culture. Another important component of communication culture is that it operates in both a leadership and a participant zone. Further, communication will always be either net positive or net negative. Human nature will tend to be attracted to positive leadership. On the other hand, human nature will be quietly resentful of negative leadership. The paradox is that if you have a problem you probably don't have a good barometer metric on how bad the problem is.

If you are not seeing signs of real enthusiasm and dedication in your workforce you have a problem. The only question is; how bad is the problem and what is it costing you?

To review the steps needed to address quiet quitting;
- step one, identify and quantify the issue by gathering direct anonymous feedback
- step two, perform an analysis of direct feedback from management versus team members
- step three, prioritize the actions and responses needed in the three action zones above

For those interested in taking action we are offering to walk you through administering and analyzing the Communication Culture Census to help you identify what state your corporate culture is in right now. All you need to do is schedule a quick meeting with us to get started. We look forward to connecting with you one on one.

About the Author

As creator and lead facilitator of the HotButton Solution program, James has unpacked and organized the complexities of human behavior into an easily understood, interactive, and experiential learning format. The content is uniquely applicable to the modern phenomenon of quiet quitting.

Recognizing that quiet quitting is the most recent label for the long-existing business challenge of building teamwork and engagement, James constructed this ebook as a quick reference roadmap to the results all businesses are looking for.

By way of background, James has organized and maintained GraftOn-SST's success, beginning in the information technology sector and growing into training and culture development. Over the years he has also leveraged his organizational skills to support charity initiatives, in support of homeless and special needs groups.

The formal training, practical experience, and research that have led to the proven HotButton Solution program are the result of decades of commitment to building and maintaining results-focused teams.

In James' words "Corporate culture, and its link to communication culture, is a passionate pursuit that leverages both my years of experience and my deep understanding of the critical impact effective communication has on team engagement and results. If you want commitment and engagement from the people around you then you must start with demonstrating how much you value them, both as individuals and as team members."