



Leaders:

Ready for a Bold Answer to Service Fatigue?

3 Ways to avoid the epidemic of quiet quitting



BY LAURIE GUEST

Everyone's all heard of it by now: "quiet quitting" is the freshly coined phrase to describe the age-old behavior of not quite leaving one's job entirely but rather opting to no longer go above and beyond. It's service fatigue to the extreme, risking not just customer satisfaction but staff loyalty and your business's bottom line, too. While the idea of "quiet quitting" may be new to many these days, those of us who study customer service have spoken for decades about the root cause and possible solutions for this kind of disengagement and underperformance. The issues may not be new, but these innovative solutions offer new ways to reinvigorate your team.

To bust out of service fatigue and prevent "quiet quitting," leadership must take bold action, making changes that aren't always easy. But then again, if it was easy, everyone would be doing it, and we wouldn't be facing an epidemic of workplace ambivalence.



There are three foundational business elements that cause a decline in team engagement: rules, beliefs and praise. When leadership actively turns its attention to these governing principles, the desire to untether from one's career shrinks.

Rules of Professional Conduct

One of the biggest changes reported in a post-pandemic workplace is the decaying boundaries around acceptable behavior. With the current U.S. unemployment rate at just 3.5%, it's an employee's market. There's an urgent need to keep positions filled, and it's easy for managers to feel that having any warm body in the role is better than no body at all. But when staff are confident they can easily get another job (and one without too much personal sacrifice), the motivation to meet the company rules of conduct notably decreases. Too often what results is a situation where the "tail wags the dog," and employers are left with little choice but to turn a blind eye to staff misbehavior. And as soon as the poor actions are disregarded once, the issue slowly turns to a fast-spreading cancer. Little by little, the "abnormal cells" influence those around them and a negative attitude becomes contagious.

Stop the spread in its tracks with bold action. During the interview process and onboarding, clearly state the company's behavior expectations and the consequences of not following the rules. Things like dress code, arrival and departure times and superior customer service delivery are examples of conduct that need clearly stated policies and procedures. Being able to enforce consequences is the harder part of this equation, but most issues can often be solved with respectful and productive conversations. Be bold and stand firm to enforce the most essential rules and relax on those you can, in order to create the culture you desire.

Belief in the Mission

As a leader, you're invested in your company's reputation, and you're passionate about achieving successful outcomes. Ideally, your staff matches this dedication level, like two parallel lines on the same path, mirroring each other in vision, mission and values. However, when one of the parties begins to slowly drift at a different angle, the trajectory changes, and eventually, the "mission gap" is wider than can be tolerated. For example, an employee may slip on their work ethic, bend the rules or make unacceptable choices during key interactions. And remember: "mission gap" isn't always caused by inattentive staff. Sometimes, it's leadership who changes direction and forgets to bring everyone along on the new path!

To close the "mission gap," boldly embrace your company's purpose, values and direction. Frequent reviews of the company's real mission — not just reciting the words that appear on a sign hung on the conference room wall — will ensure everyone on the team is on the same page. Be as

blunt as possible when it comes to communicating your company's direction, knowing that a good team will work to achieve that goal when it is real, attainable and shared.

Praise and Recognition

Many leaders have trouble providing genuine praise for a job well done. Countless studies show that recognition catapults engagement and productivity levels, so if it is loyalty we seek, hiding the praise is the worst possible course of action. With a global workforce dominated by those under 40, there is no doubt that the importance of attention, applause, and appreciation can't be ignored, but it is. And if good work goes continuously unrecognized or discipline in the workplace involves toxicity like shame or yelling, the negative habits and destructive behavior patterns only multiply.

Go bold with your praise and watch the shift in your company culture. Learn the praise formula and utilize it in the moment and as often as possible. The technique is a simple four-part approach: start with the name of the person you are praising; comment on a specific action that is praiseworthy; indicate why it matters; and finish with a sincere thank you. "Kristen, you did an amazing job talking with that angry customer. Calming her down is what allowed us to close that sale. Well done, thank you." Take note of the difference between the well thought out message and the lazy "Hey, good job everybody." One is white noise, the other is a deal changer.

Be Bold and Bust Out of Service Fatigue

Be the courageous type of leader who is willing to adapt, who looks for ways to keep your management skills fresh and admits when things can be better. Those who have led for decades may feel like you already know it all and have seen everything. But "times, they are a changing." Are you changing with them? Those who are new to leadership may believe that fewer rules and more workplace fun is all it takes to keep people engaged. But this approach alone is not sustainable. To bust out of service fatigue and keep "quiet quitting" at bay, it's imperative not only to provide the necessary tools to your team but to continuously (and boldly) improve our skills as leaders. ✪



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