Quiet Quitting:
The Not-so-silent Phenomenon Sweeping the Workplace

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from the eyes of industry leaders

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The Not-so-silent Phenomenon Sweeping the Workplace

IN THIS ISSUE

6 Strategies for Upskilling Tomorrow's Workers Today

Going Beyond the Employee Engagement Survey

How to Manage Rewards and Compensation

Using Pay Transparency to Increase Diversity in Hiring

#3 Measure Productivity Differently

The productivity of work is not the responsibility of the worker but of the manager.

—Peter Drucker

Employee productivity is a perennially hot topic in leadership circles, but many managers have overly narrow understandings of what it is. Specifically, too often they tend to define (and measure) it in terms of face time. Placing too much emphasis on that one element limits their ability to accurately assess what their employees are doing (particularly those who are working remotely).

To get a better sense of employee productivity, leaders should start by rethinking goal setting—and be sure not to conflate a goal, which is "the end toward which effort is directed," with a task, which is "a usually assigned piece of work often to be finished within a certain time."

- Set clear and concise goals ("What does the 'end' look like when this project is complete?"), then step back and let employees determine how to meet those expectations.

- Use knowledge and experience to set deadlines based on employees' current skill sets. (Because they are still learning, it will likely take them longer to accomplish goals while they think through and learn from doing the various tasks needed to complete the project.)

- Include a discussion on how employees will keep management updated on their progress in order to ensure they don't go too far off the rails (and jeopardize deadlines).

- Discuss dates with employees and get their buy-in (while discussing any challenges they anticipate and how they might overcome them).

Keep in mind that a goal must have at least one decision point—a place where someone could make the wrong choice. An incorrect decision doesn't have to be a disaster, though. After all, a mistake can be a terrific opportunity for active learning and growth. Being told something is one thing, but trying and failing—and learning how not to do things—can sometimes carry the most educational value.

#4 Provide Interesting Work

If you want someone to do a good job, give them a good job to do.

—Frederick Herzberg

The quickest way to increase disengagement is to give people work that does not appeal to them in some way. As disengagement rises, productivity and morale plummet—and retention drops, too, as employees head out the door in search of work that gives them more satisfaction. A company that wants to keep its employees around should make sure that at least part of their job is of interest to them.

Does that mean if an employee wants to be the company's CEO, their manager should try to accommodate that interest? Yes—to a degree. Instead of outright dismissing that goal (and adopting a "Who do they think they are?!" attitude), the manager can discuss how to help that employee gain the skills and experience they need to step into a general leadership role one day. The manager should ask their employees what they want to do in life (what are their goals, and why?), then find a way to make sure that their jobs (including those that are inherently boring) involve at least one stimulating task or project that taps into those goals. Employees who feel that they are making progress toward their goals will be more engaged—and more likely to stick around.

#5 Involve Employees in the Big Picture

Research indicates that workers have three prime needs: interesting work, recognition for doing a good job, and being let in on things that are going on in the company.

—Zig Ziglar

If every employee in an organization understood the "Big Picture" of the company—its long-term goals and their role in helping to achieve them—they could have an impact on the company's success. Unfortunately, too often senior leaders decide that they don't have time to involve their employees or assume that they won't be able to understand the Big Picture. So instead of involving employees in the success of the organization, leadership reduces them to cogs in a wheel, putting them on autopilot and having them do the same job day in and day out.

Leaders need to recognize that their organizations would be better served if they gave their employees a seat at the table by involving them in decisions that affect them and letting them see how they contribute to the Big Picture. Connecting employees to the organization's goals helps them find more purpose in their work, which can lead not only to personal growth and increased retention, but also to "stronger employee engagement, heightened loyalty, and a greater willingness to recommend the company to others."

Each company brings its own value to the world. By connecting what each individual employee does on a daily basis to how they are contributing to that value, leaders can help their employees get a better understanding of the Big Picture and feel better about their role in it.

#6 Require Managers to be Good Managers

We all need people who will give us feedback. That's how we improve.

—Bill Gates

Even with the greatest CEO and executive leadership in all the world, a company with terrible middle management will struggle to succeed in the long term. Because it's the middle managers who most influence the employees, poor middle management can have disastrous downstream effects. In the past, companies could get away with promoting great individual contributors to middle management without training them, but that practice is no longer viable today. In this era of greater information sharing through reviews posted on Glassdoor, LinkedIn, and other social media, for example, candidates and employees have higher expectations of company leadership—and are increasingly demanding that managers meet them.

Feedback is one key area in which managers need to step up their game. Employees want more—and better—feedback than they are currently getting. Giving feedback isn't easy (even for the most seasoned managers), but it's an essential aspect of leadership. Managers who cannot fulfill this critical job function are letting down not only the companies that depend on them to provide needed direction and guidance to ensure that the work gets done, but also the employees who stand to benefit individually from feedback. Feedback is part of the process that gives employees the growth and development opportunities that keep them engaged and more likely to stay with their companies.

Final Thoughts on Upskilling the Workforce

Part of a leader's job is to unleash the potential in their employees (even if they don't see that potential in themselves). As the business world continues to evolve, it's critical that leaders start now to develop their employees to meet the future needs of their organizations. The labor and skills shortage shows no sign of abating soon, so companies that want a strong workforce in place a few years from now need to reassess—and revise—their strategies for engaging and retaining employees.

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