

Thinking about quiet quitting? Here's why—and how—you should talk to your boss instead

September 16 2022, by Cary Cooper



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Quiet quitting is a catchy name, popularized on social media, for something we've all probably done. Its popularity is probably down to the inevitable and much-needed pushback against "hustle culture", where younger workers are encouraged to over-function and engage in

unsustainable "[performative productivity](#)"—looking like you are working harder than you are—to get ahead in their careers. This comes at the expense of their well-being and capacity to engage meaningfully with their work.

Hesitance to perform duties outside of what your role requires can be a symptom of low [engagement](#), which can be connected to how you are managed. According to Gallup's 2022 "[state of the global workplace](#)" report, only 21% of people are engaged at work. Engagement is crucial for retention and productivity more generally.

Research by management expert Emma Soane reveals that people's engagement with work [stems from three factors](#): how meaningful they find it, their perceptions of managers, and opportunities to have two-way conversations with said managers. So, if you're feeling burned out and disengaged, what's the best way to communicate with your manager about it?

Setting boundaries and asking questions

Simply quiet quitting without warning is a risky strategy. If you have a reputation for going the extra mile, it's a bad idea to abruptly switch off that part of your workplace persona. Transparency is important, and good managers will be supportive when workers raise concerns about burnout and lack of engagement.

A conversation with your boss could be the start of reform in your workplace that leads to a better environment for everyone, by helping workers set boundaries that managers respect. Be clear about your reasons for quiet quitting, and where your employer might be able to play a role in supporting your boundaries.

Ellen Ernst Kossek, an expert in [work-life balance](#), [identified three](#)

[fundamental styles](#) of boundary management. Employees seeking healthier boundaries tend to either separate work from the rest of their life entirely, integrate work into their life, or operate in cycles that combine both approaches. All are legitimate. Decide which approach works best for your specific circumstances before having the conversation. And enter the dialogue with solutions in mind, not just complaints.

Even if you have a reasonably emotionally intelligent line manager, it is important to ask the right questions of your boss to get more involved and feel more valued. No point beating around the bush. Find a time when your boss is not stressed and is likely to be more open to dialogue, and let them know that you're not very happy, and why. People who are quiet quitting may feel undervalued, overworked, exploited and want a [better balance](#) in their lives.

Here are some questions you could ask to get the conversation flowing:

- What do you really think of the quality of my work?
- What do you think about the hours I am working?
- How do you feel about my relationship with other members of the team?
- Do you think you and I have a good working relationship?

Based on their response, you have the opportunity to let the boss know just how you feel. There is always a risk in doing this, depending on their openness, but it's better to speak up than to stay unhappy and operating at half throttle.

Better engagement at work

Organizations depend on having an engaged workforce. Engagement is a fragile and precious resource. It can decay for a variety of reasons,

including avoidable and trivial frustrations. In a 2022 [survey of IT workers](#), a whopping 84% of study participants reported being unhappy because of the software they were using.

It's easy to see how low-level departmental gripes can deplete morale and engagement over time, leading to the sort of burnout that causes people to quit, quietly or otherwise.

Dominic Ashley-Timms, CEO of management performance consultancy Notion, is coauthoring a book on helping managers improve engagement—ultimately minimizing the negative effect of quiet quitting. He believes the key to improving engagement is for managers to ask better quality (and better timed) questions of their employees. If managers understand themselves in terms of the effect they have on their staff, they will better understand how to keep their employees engaged.

This is consistent with the concerns of the [National Forum for Health and Well-being at Work](#) (a body of over 40 global employers), which has been advocating that managers need to improve their social and [interpersonal skills](#) so that employees feel more valued. Such engagement will lead to higher levels of productivity at work and less inclination toward quiet quitting.

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