

Reducing Conflict 62 Quotas Encourage Quiet Quitting

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Quiet Quitting is a relatively new term for an old phenomenon. When the Gallup Organization measures employee engagement, they have three states for people. Employees can be highly engaged, actively disengaged, or engaged.

Measurements of these three groups are fairly consistent. Highly engaged employees run about 30%. Actively disengaged usually runs about 20%.

This leaves engaged workers at about 50%. The figures vary a bit from year to year, but the general pattern remains consistent.

Half of the employees are quiet quitters

About half of working people are not upset enough to leave the organization. However, they also are not inspired to do their best. This is the group where you find the quiet quitters. They show up and draw their paycheck but do not perform near their potential.

There are several factors that can cause people to become quiet quitters. People endure abuse from their superior but quietly find ways to get even. Many administrative procedures are a burden, so people just check the box without getting involved in the content. Meetings can become an unwanted distraction. Rules on personal comportment can insult workers.

A real example of a quota system

I heard about a situation recently where a good employee is being abused by her manager. The employee is in danger of becoming a quiet quitter.

Since the pandemic, the workforce of this employee's company has been working remotely. The management team decided to attempt to track the number of productive tasks each employee completes daily. They use an automated report generation technology in order to establish an objective quota for performance reviews. However, the tasks of each employee are not all the same

In this situation, the manager told the employee that the acceptable number of tasks was 10 per day. The employee, who values quality work, had previously been performing 8 tasks per day without errors. She voiced her discomfort with this seemingly unrealistic quota, believing it may lead to future errors by rushing. The manager assured her it was an attainable goal.

The employee thought to herself that she does a lot of work within her job description which would not be quantifiable in this report. However, being highly motivated at her baseline, she increased her efforts in an attempt to meet requirements. She worked very hard and finally started to attain 11 consistent tasks per day. She was still performing her other duties that the productivity reporting was not tracking.

Negative feedback from the manager

At their next monthly supervisory meeting, her manager stated that they have changed the quota to 15 per day. The productivity report did not pull accurate numbers. They indicated the employee completed only eight tasks per day. A monthly write up indicated deficiencies in the employee's quota.

Actually, the employee had evidence that she completed 11 tasks a day in addition to other duties. She sent the manager back to look again.

The manager then pulled a different report that indicated she had completed 17 tasks a day. There was no explanation for the discrepancy in the numbers. Also, there was also no apology for the negative review.

Failures on the part of the manager

1. This manager did not inquire why the employee felt the expected quota was not realistic. There was no investigation into all the daily activities of that employee. The manager needed to know if the quota was realistic while performing other duties and upholding quality standards.
2. A change in the acceptable number of tasks was not communicated to the employee in a timely fashion.
3. There was no justification given for the increase.
4. A common standard was missing as to what constituted having "completed" a task.
5. There was no pilot of the system, which led to inaccurate results. The report did not include all of the work this employee completed within her job description.
6. Using a broken system caused the manager to reprimand the employee for something that was inaccurate.
7. The manager did not apologize to the employee for the gaff. There was also no indication of future corrective action.

Resulting quiet quitting

How would you feel if you were that employee? I suspect you would feel very low motivation going forward. If this is the way her manager treats people, you can see why there is low engagement in the work.

Going forward, this manager may gain compliance because the employee needs a paycheck. It will cause the employee to focus on only one part of her job description going forward. She will let what does not show up on productivity reports fall by the wayside. Forget about going the extra mile to help the company.

Things to consider when rolling out a quota system

The first piece of advice is to be absolutely sure that you need to do it. An automated system for keeping track of the activities of a remote employee is perilous. There are so many potential pitfalls that you must avoid. My advice is DON'T DO IT.

1. If you **MUST** have a quota, start with collecting information. Learn the scope of what each employee does. Determine what data you should collect and if the system can capture it.
2. Learn what additional work the staff may be doing that would not be quantifiable on the tracking report.
3. Pilot your electronic tracking system with a few trusted seasoned employees. Ensure the tracking system is capturing all the data accurately. Ask for candid feedback. Compare data. Make adjustments as needed. Decide if it's a useful tool or not.
4. Roll out the quota to staff well in advance, with clear information about why you are tracking the information. What specifically are you tracking and how, along with a clear expectation of the numbers? Let staff ask questions.
5. Re-evaluate. Take the feedback regarding the quota or tracking system. If a mistake is made, acknowledge it. Re-evaluate and address any concerns.
6. Understand the limitations of data collection. Other less quantifiable factors also play into the holistic view of an employee's performance; quality, attitude, teamwork, promptness, etc.
7. If the expected quota is not met, inquire with the employee directly to identify possible causes. Help eliminate any barriers to assist with success.

Conclusion

Any kind of quota system has a high risk of demotivating employees. They will feel a lack of trust and will respond by quietly checking out of their best performance.

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