FROM QUIET QUITTING TO QUIET REBUILDING

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There is a way those of us in leadership roles, and who have organizational power, must attune ourselves to the reality of our employees and team members in adjusting our expectations as we come out of a global pandemic that has tested our resilience and coping skills to their limit. Asking our team members and employees "to go the extra mile" in this season is like asking a person who has just finished a marathon why they aren't up for doing a 5K sprint.

A colleague of mine recently shared about the concept of "quiet- quitting" which sparked my curiosity. I assumed it must be something scandalous and unethical in nature, but as I read further in Forbes Magazine and the Harvard Business Review, I was surprised to learn it essentially sounds like people learning how to hold healthy boundaries in their workspaces. That said, "quiet- quitting" can take on more insidious tones for some who have found ways to continue to be paid but are reluctant to perform any task that is not explicitly outlined in a job description. The latter group seems to be reacting to a systemic ill of over-workaholism at the expense of people but is doing so in a way that can lead to a lack of agency and an atrophy of healthy proactivity.

In humanitarian aid work the line can be even more confusing since most of the work we do is not for economic gain but rather for the betterment of people's wellbeing. It is also near impossible to create job descriptions that anticipate all the variables that pop up in the work in the field. Nevertheless, there must be another path forward that offers an alternative to the widely journeyed paths of trudging through the work without meaning, quitting, or overworking oneself to the point of burnout.

How do we as leaders foster cultures that can move people from quiet quitting to quietly rebuilding?

- **Make room to listen** to how your employees are feeling both in their jobs and in their lives, especially making room for any grievances and losses without taking it personally or getting defensive for the organization. This allows a person to have a space to express the range of emotions of what they might be feeling without having to react or shut down.

- **Make an intentional effort to verbally affirm your team members**. Express appreciation and gratitude for the work that has been done during a challenging season. Re-affirm how their well-being matters to you as much as anyone else's well-being in the mission of the organization including the lives of the beneficiaries of the aid work.

- **Ask questions** about what is making the work feel stressful, isolating, or hurtful and seek to empathize about what is challenging without jumping to problem solving or defending. This allows you to learn about blind spots in the organization that might really need to change at a systemic level and not just assuming people need to work harder for things to work better.

- Be open to making systemic changes at an organizational level that center your employees well-being even if it costs more in other ways. This communicates through concrete actions that your organization is not willing to promote the wellbeing of the organization at the expense of the personhood of your employees. This buffers against resentment and compassion fatigue and will keep good people around longer.

- Collaboratively problem solve regarding ways to create more connection relationally in the workplace. Allocate time and resources for re-building connection relationally after a long season of isolation for many. This can help to counteract the sense of isolation and disconnection that many feel in their workplaces and can provide healthy motivation for staying in the work because of a sense of belonging.

- Model a healthy lifestyle by giving permission for healthy limit setting as a sign of strength. Dare to create a new culture: instead of boasting about how hard you are over-working, try "boasting" about times you have chosen to rest and renew your energies as part of the efficiency of the work. This combats the idea that the only valuable thing in a work environment is production and achievement and centers the importance of wellbeing for all.

- When team members express areas of weakness reframe limitations as opportunities for collaboration versus as points of shame. Reframe ways the person might reach out for support from someone else in the team to learn a new skill, to delegate a task to someone who has a natural strength in that area, or to collaboratively work together. This will allow people to dare to be more open and transparent about areas of weakness instead of hiding in shame or quitting because they feel like failures in their roles or stuck doing tasks that do not align with their strengths.

- Prime the good and the generative by inquiring about the sense of purpose that originally drew the employee to the organization. Ask how the employee or team member might be able to call forth skills and talents in new ways to connect to the mission of the organization that would be meaningful and enjoyable for them. This can help re-orient team members around the sense of meaning that motivates them to go above and beyond when they feel inspired to do so intrinsically and leads to a sense of agency.

Resources:

Bolino, M. C., Hsiung, H.-H., Harvey, J., & LePine, J. A. (2015). "Well, I'm tired of tryin'!" Organizational citizenship behavior and citizenship fatigue. Journal of Applied Psychology, 100(1), 56–74. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037583

How to Motivate Employees to Go Beyond their Jobs. https://hbr.org/2017/09/how-to-motivate-employees-to-go-beyond-their-jobs

Quiet Quitting the Real Story (Don't Blame Gen Z). https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnbremen/2022/09/20/quiet-quitting-the-real-story-dont-blame-gen-z/?sh=c5406b42eab4

When Quiet quitting is Worse than the Real Thing. https://hbr.org/2022/09/when-quiet-quitting-is-worse-than-the-real-thing