Quiet Quitting: The Chicken or The Egg?

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Quiet quitting has been making headlines for the past few weeks, it's the latest buzz word for a problem that companies have always faced – lack of employee engagement. Gallup recently reported an uptick in employee disengagement, with 50% being Disengaged and 18% Actively Disengaged. It is not surprising that there is an uptick. However, what is surprising is that the number is not higher than reported. There have always been, and there always will be, employees who do the bare minimum on the job.

The fact is too many leaders continue to turn a blind eye to a simple concept that is foundational to their culture, their employee experience, and their customer experience:

FIRST:	*SECOND:*	*THIRD:*
Your company vision & mission is a promise to BOTH your customers and your employees. It should engage and motivate them to take action.	*Customers expect the promise to be DELIVERED CONSISTENTLY.*	*Employees expect your promise to be inspiring, engaging, and motivating to deliver it to EVERY customer at EVERY interaction.*

Gallup recently stated that "The overall decline was especially related to clarity of expectations, opportunities to learn and grow, feeling cared about, and a connection to the organization's mission or purpose -- signaling a growing disconnect between employees and their employers." Having conducted employee engagement surveys across numerous industries, these are not new reasons for employee disengagement, but in today's world the solutions to address them have changed.

Most organizations were not equipped at the start of the pandemic for the vast changes to the workforce and environment – employees working remotely, the technology requirements, communication, etc. The technology adaptation required was the lowest hurdle to overcome, the tallest were people management and culture.

That raises an interesting question:
Are today's engagement scores the outcome of the workplace and employee emotional changes driven by the pandemic?

There is ongoing debate on the impact pandemic WFH policies and even now the return to the office policies have had on employee engagement. Remote work programs have advantages and disadvantages; one notable downside is that they often impede organizations from creating and maintaining their company culture. Company culture is fostered, in large part, by informal and formal socialization - employees coming together and engaging in team-building activities, division- or company-wide meetings. One of the best ways companies can increase engagement is to reinforce the impact that not only the company has but the impact each employee has on customers' lives, as well as company vision and mission.

Organization culture also plays a significant role on employee engagement. According to a study published in the California Management Review, How Have Organizational Cultures Shifted During the COVID-19 Pandemic, we see that organizations tended to shift from a high-performance focus to one that valued

empathy, understanding, and mutual support. Specifically, organizations shifted their focus on several key cultural attributes:

DECREASED FOCUS	INCREASED FOCUS
Flexibility	Customer orientation
Transparency	Individualism
Supportiveness	Detail orientation
Decisiveness	Results orientation
Confronting Conflict	Collaboration

During the pandemic, regular leadership communication was associated with positive employee experiences. Even with increased focus on flexibility, it did not emerge as an attribute to drive positive employee experiences; the authors hypothesized that perhaps "its advantages (e.g., no commute) were matched by certain negatives (e.g., crowded quarters at home)". Most negative experiences were associated with accessing resources, the way employees were communicating and collaborating, and culture change. The authors believed that the focus shift in key cultural attributes was unsettling for many and most likely damaging for organizational culture.

Culture change does not happen through leadership mandate, starting with new mission statements or making changes to company structure; it's critical to start with actions, because culture change only happens when employees are motivated to *take action*. Show employees the change you want to see by:

Engaging cross-functional teams to innovate and frame issues in a manner that stirs emotion and action.

Finding quick wins to build and gain supporters.

Communicating quick wins.

Continuing to engage broader cross-functional teams to innovate and keep momentum going.

Developing programs that teach and amplify the behaviors and attitudes that align to you culture, vision and mission.

Continuing to communicate, tell customer and employee stories that bring your culture to life. ●

LESSONS FOR LEADERS

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*1.
Refocus on culture*

*2.
Communicate with employees on a frequent basis.*

*3.
Continue to be transparent.*

*4.
Invest in employee research (e.g., Voice of Employee, employee engagement, focus groups), and data analytics.*

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Evaluate positive cultural attributes that have emerged since the pandemic and can be a source of strength and innovation.

Evaluate which cultural elements have been suppressed during the pandemic and need to be reinforced.

About the Author

Ed Murphy,
President, Imprint CX

Co-founder and President of Imprint CX, a modern marketing and customer experience services company.

Ed has achieved a very successful career by building relationships and providing innovative solutions to meet clients' needs. With over thirty years as a global researcher, management consultant, and business leader, Ed brings his experience, expertise, and passion to every consulting. assignment.

To learn more about ImprintCX contact Ed at Ed@imprintcx.com

ImprintCX is a modern marketing and customer experience services company that seamlessly combines insights, consulting, and activation into one integrated offering. The company is powered by sophisticated analytics, deep human understanding and design thinking to help organizations develop and deploy retention and lifetime value strategies for their high impact customers. Collectively, the ImprintCX team has developed and lead hundreds of customer experience transformations for Fortune 500 companies such as Mercedes Benz, Honeywell, Pizza Hut and Walmart.com.