

There's a new way for stressed employees to get a little R&R. Quiet vacationing, or taking time off work without telling your boss, has now become a thing. Quiet-vacationing employees head off on a trip and log in just enough to create the illusion that they're online full-time as usual. At first glance this might seem like a workable solution if you need a break but don't feel you can completely step away for a week or two. But upon closer inspection, quiet vacationing reveals a serious **rift** in company culture and the long-term viability of employees.

"Quiet vacationing, the latest 'Quiet' workplace phenomenon, is where employees take work-life balance into their own hands by building in recharge and downtime breaks without informing their manager or submitting PTO requests," says Karyn Rhodes, VP of HR Services at Isolved.

In a time when many companies are loudly promoting the fact that you can bring "your authentic self" to work, it's telling that so many people are choosing to be quiet about how they actually survive the daily **grind**.

Bottom line: If you have to be quiet about anything at work, there's a problem.*

Why not just take PTO? In the U.S., companies offer an average of 10 combined PTO days per year, which can be used for vacation, sick time and personal days. But according to some estimates, a **whopping** 55% of PTO is left unused every year.

"There are many reasons why this is happening, the majority of which point to the pressure employees are under to perform," says Rhodes. "Data shows that almost 50% of employees aren't comfortable taking time off, and when they do, they still feel pressure to remain available."

I asked Rhodes why people are feeling so overworked and under-supported. Isn't remote and hybrid work supposed to help with that? "Over the last year, many employees were expected to take on the additional workloads **amidst** layoffs and hiring slowdowns with 58% percent reporting their organization requested they take on extra responsibilities," she says.

In other words, remote work has become both a blessing and a curse. It's great to have connectivity everywhere and at all hours—until it's not.

"This growing workload, in addition to the sustained pressure to perform effectively, leads to feelings of stress, frustration and ultimate burnout for most employees," Rhodes adds.**

Why quiet vacations aren't working: Although more stressed employees are seeking relief through quiet vacationing, it may not deliver the hoped-for benefits. "These 'hush trips' are just a temporary solution," Rhodes says. "Without truly unplugging from work and establishing work-life boundaries, employees are more likely to burn out over time, negatively impacting their well-being and productivity."

That's why burnout is more than just a minor issue that can be remedied with a few secret days of briefly logging in. "Data shows that 71% of employees believe burnout impacts their performance, affecting their enthusiasm and limiting their productivity," says Rhodes. "The most effective strategy to recharge and mitigate burnout is prioritizing time away from work."

There's also the worry that your quiet vacation will be discovered. One unguarded photo on your social platforms can raise the question of where exactly you are—and why you're not getting that project wrapped up. "It's up to HR and business leaders to encourage a sustainable approach to work-life balance that allows employees to fully disconnect without fearing repercussions," says Rhodes.

So how can employers alleviate employee burnout so people don't feel the need to quiet-vacation? "Unfortunately, there isn't a *one-size-fits-all solution*," says Rhodes. "While reports show flexible work environments are the top way employers can address burnout, this only appeals to 52% of employees.

"In addition to flexible work, employees are also interested in self-help resources, self-service tools and policies for communicating outside of working hours."***

While quiet vacationing isn't ideal for employees because they can't fully disconnect, it also has negative implications for the company. "While it's true that this trend may also cause organizational inefficiencies or slowed project timelines, it reveals a much larger issue: a negative company culture," warns Rhodes.

Having to keep anything secret at work should be a warning bell that the company culture isn't everything it should be. "When employees feel that they must lie to managers or leaders to take PTO—a benefit that they are entitled to utilize—it signals they don't believe their organization encourages workers to disconnect and recharge," says Rhodes.

Rhodes points to the research showing the benefits of taking time out of work, with employees returning with clearer minds and producing at higher levels. "Not allowing workers to recharge fuels burnout, an issue that affects 65% of employees," she says.

Further, quiet vacationing indicates a significant lack of trust within the organization. Rhodes urges leaders to look beyond the immediate issue to the deeper problem—and act accordingly. "Instead of implementing temporary solutions like punishing those who quiet vacation, organizations must look internally at policies and management training to see if they are unknowingly promoting an unhealthy balance and then work to address those issues."

"Trends like quiet vacationing serve as a **stark** reminder that conversations around mental health, flexibility and PTO are just as significant as meetings and deadline reminders," says Rhodes.

To help reverse this trend, Rhodes suggests several actions that HR leaders can take:

Support both managers and employees in taking time off

Frequently emphasize the benefits of fully disconnecting from work when taking PTO

Reinforce positive work-life balance behaviors through meaningful recognition strategies

Rift : A separation

Grind: hard dull work

Whopping: Very large amount

Amidst: In the middle of

Stark: complete; sheer