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employees from promotions.

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By Jo Constantz and Madison Mills, Bloomberg News (TNS)

Quiet quitting has heaped attention on so-called “slacker” employees—or those who seem content just fulfilling their job descriptions. But experts say there’s a flip side: “quiet firing.”

The term has generated buzz on the internet with definitions ranging from employers who actively make working conditions miserable to forcing workers to

resign, also known as “constructive discharge.” The phrase can also apply to

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said quiet quitting doesn't gel with her experience with candidates, who are often very passionate about their work.

“I started thinking about why someone might start doing the ‘bare minimum,’ and I realized maybe the problem isn't so much the employees but employers or managers that aren't doing much to support or invest in their employees—‘quiet firing,’” Dilber wrote in an email. “When you're in an environment that feels like a dead end, it's hard to want to give more.”

Examples of quiet firing include denying raises for years on end, blocking employees from opportunities for growth or promotion, or neglecting to give direct and timely feedback. Dilber says employers may use this as an intentional strategy to get people to quit without firing them, or they may simply be new to management and not even realize the impact of their actions.

At a previous company where she worked, the human resources department used an evaluation system that would rate each employees' “potential,” Dilber said. Workers with solid performance but purported “low potential” were, for the most part, simply left alone.

“But no one really invested in growing them, they weren't getting raises, and they weren't considered for promotions,” Dilber said. “Often, they had no idea why, and eventually, they'd leave because they felt unappreciated. In many cases, I saw those people go on to do quite well in their next role with more supportive leadership.”

And in a labor market with about two jobs for each unemployed person, workers who feel unappreciated don't have to stick around. The U.S. economy added 315,00 jobs in August, showing robust growth even in the face of persistent inflation and rising interest rates.

Ella Washington, an organizational psychologist and diversity consultant, said that

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attractive salary could keep people in a job despite a bad boss, that is much less true now than it was before the pandemic,” the report’s authors wrote.

Many managers also don’t feel equipped to have tough conversations with their employees about their performance. But staying silent does direct reports a serious disservice. “To not provide appropriate feedback and an opportunity to course correct—that is not ethical management and leadership,” Washington said.

Women and people of color tend to be at even greater risk of quiet firing, as they’re often underrepresented in leadership roles and tend to get less support from managers. Ultimately, it’s important for employers to invest in the development of new managers and make sure the expectations of the role are clear, said Washington.

Well-meaning or not, a bad manager can destroy employee morale, engagement and performance. This dynamic can also push great talent out the door before they’ve had the opportunity and support necessary to grow.

“I think a lot of people who are ‘quiet quitting’ are actually working under poor leaders, which makes it hard for them to stay motivated or have any investment in going above and beyond the bare minimum,” Dilber said.

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