What Does Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Chester I. Barnard Have to Do With Quiet Quitting?

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Media sources have blended aspects of social loafing with aspects of the free rider problem which they now call "quiet quitting." Social loafing is decades old theory from the social psychology literature, used to explain why individuals work less hard in groups. The free rider problem is a theory, mainly from economics, that explains the insatiable desire of people who do not contribute to the cost of production for goods and services which they consume. Employees' perceptions of a firm's social contract inform their understanding of psychological contracts, and inevitably their interpretation of fairness in job descriptions. Managers who understand Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "Social Contract" and Chester I. Barnard's "Theory of Authority" will be better able to anticipate and mitigate against the collective will of employees. In this article, we present three recommendations that, if implemented correctly, will help managers resolve problems leading to quiet quitting.

Keywords: authority, Chester I. Barnard, contract, free rider, power, quitting, Rousseau, social loafing

SOCIAL LOAFING THEORY

Social psychologists have theorized for decades the predictability of *social loafing*, which is the tendency of individuals to work less hard in groups; slackers reduce their work efforts because accountability for the group's goal is a shared experience. Schneider (1988) said that "for several kinds of behavior they have shown that people generally work less hard while together than while alone;" however, "when individual contributions count and are evaluated comparatively, the social loafing effect is reduced" (Schneider, 1988, p. 294).

The social loafing effect in groups has shown to be a consistently predictable behavior pattern across a range of experimental studies. Seminal studies consistently found that individuals work less hard in groups. One study asked experimental subjects to pull ropes individually and in groups, showing the social loafing tendency (Ingham, Levinger, Graves, & Peckham, 1974); one asked experimental subjects to read a poem or newspaper editorial, then measured their effort alone, versus the same subject's effort in a group. Other famous experiments asked subjects to hand clap loudly; it then asked them to shout as loud as possible, then compared their shouting alone behavior with their shouting in groups behavior, consistently finding that individuals worked less hard in groups (Harkins, Latane, & Williams, 1980; Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979).

Nearly all advertised job openings will include essential and (or) preferred qualifications relating to teamwork, among the posted duties and responsibilities. A manager and potential new hire agree on the parameters of the job description during the hiring process. When an employee breaches the boundaries of command and control to which they agreed, disciplinary action (corrective action) happens. If the employee does not respond to the correction plan, that employee will be replaced. Imagine a college professor who showed up for class merely to take attendance, taught no lessons and awarded all students "A's" at semester end. What should become of such a professor? Furthermore, if all employees routinely work less hard in groups, especially doing only the bare minimum as specified in a job description, merely to remain employed, expect disaster. A grander scale of social loafing occurs at the societal level, and the free rider problem is repeatedly predicted in economic theory.

THE FREE RIDER PROBLEM

Economists for decades have been concerned with what they call *the free rider problem*. People who contribute nothing to the production of goods and services make constant demands on the goods and services produced by others; these insatiable desires occur with such regularity it is studied as one of the main theories of economics. A free rider is a person who benefits from a good or service but had no hand in the cost of its production. The crux of the *free rider problem* in economics is exemplified by the children's fable "*The Little Red Hen.*"

The Little Red Hen painstakingly solicited help on chores from a dog, a cat, and a mouse, and not one animal lifted a paw to help (Galdone, 1973). The hen was able to assemble ingredients and eventually bake a cake, despite all the "Not I's" from the groggy dog, the preoccupied cat, and the shiftless mouse. Needless to say, once the cake was baked, the dog, cat, and mouse, that refused to contribute to baking the cake, then struggled to justify why they deserved a slice. Distribution of the cake slices was a moral problem for the hen. The hen decided to consume the entire cake by itself. The fable serves as a moral lesson for children. *The Little Red Hen* also is useful as a tool to highlight the difficult moral question pertinent to economic theory, according to McNutt (2002):

> *The children's fable of the "Little Red Hen" contains a moral story. Essentially the hen asks for assistance in the production of good X but to no avail. However, once X is produced, other animals on the farm expect a distribution share, but the hen objects to this, arguing that since she produced X she should also consume all of X. Such a decision could be defined as selfish; however, it also represents an allocation rule that could be supported by either a principle of merit or indeed a principle of desert or both.* (p. 27).

How much, if at all, should people who contribute nothing to production benefit from what others produce? After watching the hen consume the entire cake alone, to the last crumb, the story ends with the dog, cat, and mouse contributing their labor thereafter to household chores, and the resolution was acceptable to all characters (Galdone, 1973). When individuals work less hard in groups, withholding the reward of production is punishment for non-contributors; however, "group defense, predator avoidance, group hunting, and cooperative breeding" are examples of collective benefits an individual can receive without an individual paying the cost of participating (Beehner & Kitchen, 2007).

Managers who understand their employees' perceptions of social contracts can begin to anticipate and prevent the problems leading to employees' *quiet quitting*: a modern phenomenon where employees have begun the practice of doing the bare minimum of their job descriptions and allowing others to take the slack, despite the degenerative consequences of such work-related attitudes. Surely, there is some type of social contract at play when employees are willing to disengage with attitudes that can be culturally destructive and profit ending.

AN INTERPRETATION OF ROUSSEAU'S SOCIAL CONTRACT

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an 18th Century French philosopher, published *Social Contract* in 1762, and the book made him famous for including the statement: "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." Rousseau believed that individuals in the uniform agreement was a "collective will" that has the ultimate say in how society governs the individual. People are born with self-preservation and an inherent ability to pity suffrage in others, which makes the imperative of individual liberty in society a necessary logical conclusion inherent in the collective will (Then & Now, 2018). People together are the sovereign—the direct democracy. Sovereignty means the collective will cannot be alienated from the people, and the power of laws enacted should be entrusted only to the people who are governed. Rousseau (1947) devotes an entire chapter called "That Sovereignty is Inalienable," and the following is an excerpt from that chapter.

> *I say, therefore, that the sovereignty, being the exercise of the general will, can never alienate itself, and that the Sovereign, which is only a collective being, cannot be represented but by itself: the power may be transmitted but not the will.* (p. 23)

Therefore, the government is by the people and for the people. The most useful elements of Rousseau's inalienability of sovereignty *ideal* are codified in the United States Constitution. Citizens of the United States have liberties granted to them by God (not by a collective will); thus, no man can justly put asunder what God has granted. Sovereignty from God is a better *idea* than sovereignty from a collective will of man. What man gives, man can take away. Unchecked, collective will can become a tyranny of the majority. Direct democracy might have contributed to the rise of Robespierre, and the terror he caused with the French executioner's guillotine! One guillotine was eventually reserved for Robespierre (TheFortress, 2022).

It is easy to surmise that Rousseau's advocacy for direct democracy was flawed; it is unlikely he would have advocated for a representative republic, with three main branches of government, with checks and balances, with presidential elections decided by the concentrated voting practices of 538 electors: [435 US Representative + 100 US Senators + 3 from the District of Columbia]. The Electoral College is how the United States of America, every four years, elects the Commander and Chief of the Executive branch, the President of the United States. This is why the first candidate to reach 270 electoral votes is "The President Elect of the USA." The 21st Century, however, might be adding more credence to collective will.

That Sovereignty Is Inalienable in At-Will Employment

Aspects of Rousseau's worldview on the collective will spill over into private business at times, sometimes to the chagrin of modern managers, especially in at-will employment situations. There is no greater threat to corporate governance than when managers lose complete control over those they govern. Owners, executives, and managers throughout the chain of command understand completely a loss of control—most unfortunately when they have completely lost control. Language is control: communication is governance. The employees in any organization, regardless of its size, are governed by choice.

Incentives and pay structures are just that, but the governed are controlled by self-discipline and agreeableness to the constraints of job analysis and design, with duties and responsibilities negotiated from time to time, but continuously. No job description can exist as an indelible arrangement between manager and employee. The employee is to whom the job description applies. Therefore, the communicative command of the job description ultimately is compliance on the part of the collective will of all employees (Akerlof, 2012; Wells, 1963). There is a very recent example of language as control: communication is governance—by applying Chester I. Barnard's Theory of Authority (Barnard, 1968).

VACCINE MANDATES VERSUS BARNARD'S THEORY OF AUTHORITY

Southwest Airlines recently learned the hard way when Covid-19 vaccine shots were mandated for all its employees. A very large population of workers felt that they had no voice in the dictate; however, when nearly 1000 employees, claiming "not to be on strike," across many job titles, especially pilots, cabin crews and luggage handlers called in sick over one weekend, more than 2,000 grounded flights was the result (Josephs, 2021; Koenig & Swenson, 2021). The financial loss brought the airline executives to the bargaining table. Executives quickly learned about the high cost of violating perceived social contracts on matters of individual liberty, and the power of collective will.

Chester I. Barnard (1968) in *Functions of the Executive* explicated the power of the governed in a chapter titled, "*Theory of Authority*." The power of a communicative command is rooted in the recipient's willingness to comply with the command (Isomura, 2021). The following passage is perhaps Barnard's (1968) best treatment of his Theory of Authority:

> *The inappropriateness of law and government administration, lack of understanding of the ultimate basis of authority, indifference to the motives governing individual support, untimely or impossible legislation, as is well known destroy "respect for law and order," that is, destroy objective political authority. In democracies, the normal reaction is to change the law and administration through political action. But when the majorities are unable to understand that authority rests fundamentally upon the consent of minorities as well as of majorities, or when the system is autocratic or absolute, the liquidation of attempted tyranny is through revolution or civil war. <u>Authority lies always with him to whom it applies. Coercion creates a contrary illusion, but the use of force ipso facto destroys the authority postulate.</u> It creates a new authority, a new situation, and a new objective, which is granted when the force is accepted* (p. 183).

Airline executives also experienced Barnard's *Theory of Authority* firsthand; that authority in any communicative command "lies always with him to whom it applies;" the recipient's willingness to comply with the command matters—even in military conflict, on the battlefield, and under enemy fire! Imagine an army general, ordering a private to commit suicide with the private's weapon. The private would likely respond, "No Sir! I DON'T THINK SO, SIR!" The private knows the general has just violated military law, and the greater law of nature too was violated. Gazell (1970, p. 70) argued that Barnard failed to distinguish between authority and power; however, it is clear to the authors of this study that power and authority share the same dependency as, climate and culture, that one begets the other, reinforces the other. We also now know much more about communication: the flow of information, because of Katz & Kahn (1966) who argued that "The exchange of information and the transmission of meaning—is the very essence of a social system or an organization." Despite having social networks everywhere, i.e. Tik Tok, Instagram, email Reply All, and numerous other modern technologies, there remains a need for social systems to restrict communication networks. Information overload is more prominent today than before computer technologies were made ubiquitous. Barnard was before his time with his explication of authority-flow theory.

It is impossible to be the boss when enough employees refuse direct orders on the grounds of perceived breaches in a social contract. Employees can limit the boss's formal authority (Wells, 1963). That sovereignty is inalienable, in the case of Southwest Airlines, superseded a perceived suspicious arbitrary mandate. Bodily autonomy became more important than job security at Southwest Airlines when over 1000 employees decided that a breach of their liberty was underway. Historians might refer to the stand Southwest employees made, decades from now, as *The Revolt against the Needle*—employees' refusing injections of an experimental vaccine into their bodies despite being under extreme coercion of job loss. Executives at Southwest Airlines ignored the "objective aspect" of the command, which imperiled the organizational structure in terms of the lines of communicative command. Authority-flow theory predicts that mandatory COVID-19 shots could not be tolerated by the collective will; thus, authority was denied to the superiors, as Barnard said previously, *"when the system is autocratic or absolute, the liquidation of attempted tyranny is through revolution or civil war"* (Barnard, 1968; Wells, 1963; Zanda, 2018).

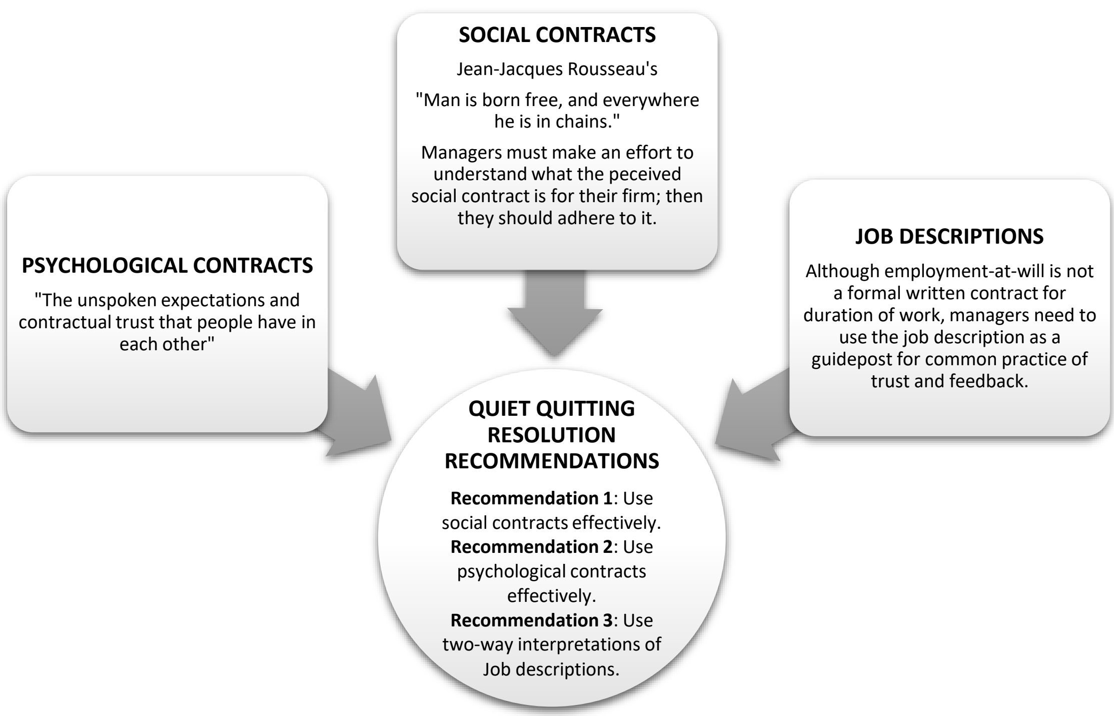
It would have been impossible for a few dozen low-ranking Southwest employees to change the minds of those executives; nevertheless, when a huge percent of the total workforce became repulsed by what was seen by them as a violation of a perceived social contract: their bodily autonomy, their human rights; their stance [that sovereignty is inalienably demonstrated in the collective will] suddenly became indissoluble with the profit and loss statement of Southwest. That weekend is reported by the company and numerous media sources to have cost the airline upwards of $75 million in losses, an unsustainable amount for any airline (McEvoy, 2021; Silk, 2021). Airline executives quickly reversed the policy and chose a more diplomatic, inclusive approach to communicative compliance. Executives must be ever mindful of the society from which they draw their labor resources. These types of stressors are problematic leading to employees quiet quitting.

QUIET QUITTING RESOLUTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Earlier, we defined *quit quitting* as a modern phenomenon where employees have begun the practice of doing the bare minimum of their job descriptions and allowing others to take the slack, despite the degenerative consequences of such work-related attitudes. The communication climate, and the mood at Southwest Airlines following the revolt could not have been too pleasant. Managers' actions shape culture and climate; they foster trust, while at the same time are tasked with destroying dysfunctional cultures to rebuild culture to their vision (Bell & Martin, 2019a; Schein, 1992). *Quiet quitting* may be a paradigm shift in some industries, especially healthcare (Formica & Sfodera, 2022). One blogger believes quiet quitting is a new name for an old form of *industrial action* (Lord, 2022).

However, what appears to be the case is a combination of social loafing and the free rider problem. When employees in general have disdain for doing work beyond their job descriptions, this quiet quitting is an appeal to management to take action. We make three recommendations to resolve the problems of quiet quitting. Figure 1 illustrates the main factors managers must grasp to resolve quiet quitting. Managers need to be keen on understanding employees' motivations when relating to 1) perceived social contracts, 2) psychological contracts, and 3) two-way interpretations of job descriptions.

FIGURE 1
THE FACTORS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO RESOLVE QUIET QUITTING



Examining the history of business has often found the underlying foundation of companies that have experienced admirable financial success and low employee turnover is their commitment to viewing the employee as their number one stakeholder (Men et al., 2022). When managers are perceived as communicating honestly and transparently, it is widely accepted to be one of the most important factors in determining employee attitudes and behavior in the workplace (Vansteenkiste et al., 2007). When employees believe social and psychological contracts are honored and job description interpretations are mutually beneficial, it allows for a higher level of employee vulnerability and risk-taking to the benefit of the business (Men et al., 2022).

As previously stated, the costs of quiet quitting are too high to simply be absorbed by companies who desire to grow in their perspective industries. When psychological contracts are not honored in the workplace, it increases the likelihood of negative behaviors such as bullying (Rajalakshmi & Naresh, 2018) and reduces affective organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Wangrow et al., 2021), resulting in a higher level of quiet quitting, leading to low employee production and morale (Williams, 2001). Also, when social contracts are seemingly disingenuous and employees believe their freedom is being taken away, work product decreases and the unity of the work team disappears (Rodgers, 2021). These negative consequences can be avoided when companies proactively seek opportunities to give voice to employees in efforts to curtail quiet quitting.

Recommendation 1: Use Perceived Social Contracts Effectively

Use your version of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract. Managers must make an effort to understand what the perceived social contract is for their firm, and their workers. Each firm will have a unique perceived social contract. What types of executive decisions will result in non-compliance with the communication command? Chester I. Barnard (1968) argues that executives should gain an understanding of these limits before the command being issued: don't give orders that cannot be complied with; don't give orders that cannot be understood; don't give immoral orders that go against the best interest of the recipient.

As for the aforementioned airline, the breaking point for workers was their bodily autonomy being breached and the coercive threat of termination for non-compliance with the order for a mandatory Covid-19 shot. Executives underestimated the damage that could be caused if the workers' refused to comply. The nature and pace of the work routines will determine the contract terms. Employees, however, are working minimally, with social loafing, and quiet quitting, when they perceive the firm's social contract is unfair. Doing less, doing the bare minimum to maintain employment appears to be the current trend in corporate America. Managers can gradually change the firm's social contract by changing the psychological contract for each worker in the direction of goal achievements.

It would be appropriate for organizations to repeatedly emphasize the value of the employee as an individual in efforts to proactively honor the perceived social contract between the organization and the employee. Beer (et al., 2022) finds honoring social contracts leads to work worthiness and fosters emotional energy and greater employee effort to achieve a shared mission, benefitting the employee personally and the organization financially. On the other hand, when employees feel neglected by their employees concerning care or communication, work meaning decreases (Kong & Belkin, 2022), and the likelihood of quiet quitting increases.

Social contracts can be used for the company's benefit as well. de Jonge (2018) finds when organizations offer support to employees affected by any type of social injustice, it makes good economic sense and positively influences community and employee perception of the organization. Even when organizations participate in activities such as reducing economic disparity, improving community education, or internally promoting environmentally friendly practices, employees perceive these actions as honoring the social contract with them, and society at large (Kouame et al., 2021).

Recommendation 2: Use Psychological Contracts Effectively

A psychological contract is the trust and unspoken expectations people have in each other. *Trust* is the vulnerability that we have when we make ourselves dependent on others' actions, promises, and commitments: trust is the credibility of a person in the eyes of others in shaping culture and climate within the organization (Bell, 2012; Whitener et al, 1998). Managers have expectations of their workers: workers have expectations of their managers. Managers expect employees to be honest, do a fair job for a fair wage, don't abuse privileges. On the other hand, employees expect managerialism to help them grant authority to a superior when they are in emotional pain gyrating in the zone of indifference (Golembiewski, & Kuhnert, 1994; Rabin, 1994); by equitable treatment in the interpersonal communication of scientific management of the production function (Bell, 2011; Bell & Martin, 2012).

As the speed of business increases significantly because of advances in globalization and technology, organizations must be highly adept in their abilities to create new psychological contracts that are mutually beneficial and are not perceived as one-sided to the organization's advantage (van Gilst et al., 2020). The bottom line, when psychological contracts are breached, it is very difficult to maintain a high level of trust in the employer-employee relationship, which is needed to maintain a productive employee (Brown et al., 2015). Guildner (1960) long stated employees adapt their contributions in response to the organizations fulfilling their obligations to the employee. Therefore, the organization must show its willingness to honor and administer psychological contracts effectively if it desires a continually productive workforce.

In situations where a breach of psychological contracts occurs on the executive or managerial level, Turney and Feldman (1998) suggest offering some sort of employee inducements to restore the employee's trust in the organization, hopefully minimizing quiet quitting and lower performance by the employee. These inducements can include money, goods, services, information, or status (Foa & Foa, 1980). Above all, providing employees with timely, accurate, and thorough information and actively seeking to lower uncertainties, especially when encountering organizational change, mitigates the feeling that the organization breached the psychological contract and lessens the risk of quiet quitting within work groups and individually (Chaudhry et al., 2009).

Recommendation 3: Use Two-Way Interpretations of Job Descriptions

Although employment-at-will is not a formal written contract for the duration of work, managers need to use the job description as a guidepost for common practice and feedback. Employment-at-will is not exempt from written rules of engagement. Most often, employment-at-will is a tacit agreement not to bring a lawsuit by either party when an employment separation occurs, in most cases; state laws do not supersede federal laws. For these reasons, every experienced manager knows about the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulatory requirements. Also, all the federal civil rights laws since 1964 will guarantee investigations during bitter separations, especially if an employee files a formal grievance with a regulatory authority. In 2018 there were nearly 100,000 race and sex discrimination complaints filed with the EEOC (Bell & Martin, 2019b).

Therefore, it is best for the manager to recognize an informal contract exists between the manager and the worker. The job description is the four corners of the relationship parameters, and easy for managers to violate. Employees want to adhere to the written job description when it best suits them: managers want to deviate from the job description when it best suits them. This tug-of-war is the main culprit in quiet quitting. Employees-at-will are not owners; don't treat them as owners; they are not under a written contract; don't treat them as if they are under a written contract. Quiet quitting is more about bad bosses, not so many bad employees (Zenger & Folkman, 2022). Quiet quitting is perceived as employees who check out of work mentally (Salem, 2022). It helps to make a proper assessment of employees' well-being and conduct fair annual performance appraisals (Bell, 2010; Bell, 2014); managers can resolve a lot of hurt feelings of inequity among workers by addressing equity fairly (Bell, 2011).

Robbins and Judge (2013) found an employee's feeling about a job and how much effort the employee exerts at the job is dependent on the evaluation of the job after the employee has the opportunity to evaluate what the job is and how the organization interprets the job description beyond words. The job description provides the formal relationship between the employee and the organization (Robbins, 1996), but job satisfaction and employee performance, or lack thereof, are considerably diminished when the employee believes the organization inaccurately presented the job description, knowingly omitting what the employee believes were unstated expectations (Ramhit, 2019).

Kim (2022) notes as organizations become more horizontal and the speed of business rapidly increases, participatory decision-making is a positive influencer of employee task performance and personal career growth. In agreement, Kimpah (2018) suggests if an employee believes their job to be meaningful, it increases an employee's self-esteem and allows the employee an opportunity to see growth opportunities within the organization. But when there is a disconnect between job description interpretation, what a manager values may not be consistent with the employee's values, which could lead to seemingly unfair job performance evaluations, feelings of distrust towards the organization, and quiet quitting from the employee. These gaps can be lessened with the use of participatory decision-making, bringing both parties together to agree upon mutually beneficial expected outcomes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Social loafers are people who shun their expected duty in the group: *free riders* contribute nothing to the production function; social loafers nor free riders do what is due of them. Individuals who dodge their responsibilities, allowing others to do the bulk of the work, in groups and the greater society are a burden. Groups don't like social loafers: society cannot tolerate free riders. Doing the bare minimum in groups merely to keep a paycheck coming is abhorrent to justice. Contributing nothing to the production of goods and services is abhorrent to economics. Quiet quitting, therefore, is a new-old thing that can be eliminated by quashing perceptions of injustice, quickly.

Barnard's Theory of Authority applies even under the threat of a death penalty in statutes, which is still no deterrent for some types of habitual criminals, regardless of the command in-laws, they will not comply with those laws under the penalty of death. If the recipient of the command does not comply, the communicative command cannot be successful. The zone of indifference is the amount of authority the recipient of the command is willing to grant to a superior. A collective will of employees can deny authority to the C-Suite because that sovereignty is inalienable, especially when executive commands exceed the zone of indifference.

Fortunately, there are methods available for managers to eliminate the problem of quiet quitting when managers understand employees' perceptions of the social contract. Modern media sources have a keen interest in putting labels on current events to control the narrative and for higher Nielsen ratings. Media puts a label on an event to make it appealing to viewers, and more lucrative for themselves. For example, for centuries in the theater an actor had stage fright when that actor became nervous on stage, forgetting lines and then spiraling out of control. However, all the same characteristics of "stage fright" from antiquity, suddenly became "communication anxiety" to appeal to a broader audience.

The world of business is changing at an ever-increasing pace, yet a cornerstone principle of successful organizations is positive employer-employee relationships. When companies neglect to honor social contracts, disregard psychological contracts, and interpret employee job descriptions in a manner interpreted by the employee as one-sided, the very likely result will be quiet quitting.

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