



Quiet Quitting and Quiet Cracking — Manager’s Quick Guide

Purpose

Help managers recognize quiet quitting and quiet cracking, understand likely causes and impacts, and respond constructively.

Outline how the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can support employees and supervisors.

Definitions

Quiet quitting: An employee reduces effort and engagement to only meet basic job requirements; withdraws from discretionary tasks and extra-role behaviors.

Quiet cracking: An employee who appears to cope but shows subtle signs of strain that may lead to mistakes, withdrawal, irritability, emotional flattening, or sudden performance decline if unaddressed.

Common signs to watch for

Decreased initiative, fewer volunteer tasks, reduced collaboration.

Consistently doing only what’s required; no overtime or stretch assignments.

Increased absenteeism, lateness, or frequent “sick” days.

Declining quality of work, missed deadlines, small but growing errors.

Social withdrawal, reduced participation in meetings, muted body language.

Irritability, passive-aggressive comments, disengaged tone.

Sudden personality change, emotional outbursts, or amplified stress reactions.

Hesitance to accept feedback or evasive responses about workload.

Possible causes

Burnout, chronic workload imbalance, unclear role expectations.

Lack of recognition, stalled career growth, inadequate resources.

Personal stressors (health, family, financial) or mental health issues.

Perceived unfair treatment, poor supervision, low psychological safety.

Organizational change or loss of meaning/purpose in the role.

Immediate manager responses (do first)

Observe and document: Note concrete examples of behavior and impact (dates, tasks, outcomes).

Private check-in: Hold a calm, nonjudgmental one-on-one. Ask open questions: “I’ve noticed X — how are you feeling? What’s getting in the way of your work?” Listen actively.

Clarify expectations: Revisit role priorities, deadlines, and performance standards. Ensure alignment on what “good enough” looks like.

Offer support: Ask what would help (workload adjustments, resources, time off, coaching).

Create a short-term plan: Agree on specific, measurable actions, timeline, and follow-up meeting.

Escalate when needed: If safety or legal concerns exist, involve HR

Communication best practices

Use specific examples, not labels cite behaviors and outcomes rather than “you seem lazy.”

Focus on impact and solutions, not blame.

Be empathetic and curious; allow space for disclosure.

Set clear, measurable expectations and document agreements.

Follow up consistently and provide timely feedback.

Do's and don'ts

Do:

Approach privately, respectfully, and quickly.
Provide clear expectations
Encourage use of available supports (training, coaching, EAP).
Monitor workload fairness across the team.

Don't:

Ignore subtle signs until performance fully collapses.
Publicly call out or humiliate the employee.
Promise accommodations you can't deliver.
Assume lack of motivation, check for underlying causes.

When performance improvement is needed

Use performance management policies: document expectations, offer support, set reasonable deadlines, and follow progressive discipline if necessary.

Keep records of conversations, agreed plans, and follow-ups.

Coordinate with HR for formal steps and legal compliance.

How the Employee Assistance Network (EAN) can help

Confidential counseling: Short-term counseling for stress, anxiety, depression, grief, relationship or family issues.

Crisis support: Immediate help for acute crises, suicidal ideation, or traumatic events.

Work-life services: Childcare, eldercare referrals, legal and financial consultations, community resources.

Coaching and skill-building: Resilience, stress management, conflict resolution, time-management workshops.

Manager consultations: Guidance for supervisors on addressing performance concerns, difficult conversations, and referrals.

Referral pathway: Managers can suggest EAN to employees, provide the EAN contact information/brochure

Confidentiality: Employee use of EAP is confidential; managers receive only information the employee agrees to share, except where safety or legal obligations require disclosure.

How to refer an employee to EAN (simple steps)

- 1. Express Care and Concern for the employee and remind them that your employer offers EAN services to help with problems like this.**
- 2. Give them a brochure and encourage them to contact EAN.**
- 3. Continue to monitor performance and consider a management referral to EAN if your organization's policy and procedures allows for performance-based referrals.**

When to involve HR or EAN immediately

Threats to safety, self-harm risk, violence, or severe impairment at work.

Repeated, unresolved performance issues after documented support.

Legal or accommodation requests (disability, FMLA, leave of absence).

Sample manager phrasing

Observation + impact + question: "I noticed you missed two project deadlines this month, which delayed the team's work. Is everything okay, and how can I help?"

Support + resource offer: "I want to help. Our EAP provides confidential counseling — would you like the contact info?"

Expectation + follow-up: "Let's agree on priorities for the next two weeks and meet again on Friday to review progress."

Quick checklist for the manager

Gather specific examples of behavior/impact

Schedule private conversation within a few days

Clarify expectations and agree on actions

Offer EAN and other supports

Document the plan and follow up

Involve HR/EAP immediately if safety/legal concerns exist

Remember

Early, compassionate, and documented manager action often prevents escalation. Use EAN as a confidential, practical resource for employees and consult HR when policies or safety issues apply.

This article was improved by AI.