

When Enthusiasm Fades: The Journey of Renee Thomas and the Quiet Quitting Phenomenon

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Abstract—This case study explores the professional journey of Renee Thomas, a talented IT engineer whose early career was marked by enthusiasm, strong client relationships, and project success. However, workplace politics, lack of recognition, and strained team dynamics gradually eroded his motivation, leading him toward “quiet quitting” a phenomenon where employees disengage emotionally and psychologically while still formally remaining in the job. The case highlights the challenges of employee engagement, organizational culture, and leadership practices in preventing talent loss.

I. INTRODUCTION

Quiet quitting is a phenomenon that has gained widespread attention in the last five years. Its rise is tied to changes in workforce expectations, organisational dynamics, and generational attitudes toward work. Younger employees, especially millennial and Gen Z, are increasingly unwilling to work beyond contractual obligations without recognition, fair compensation, and a supportive work environment.

In industries such as IT, where the demand for skilled professionals is high, quiet quitting has significant implications. For companies, it means losing discretionary effort and innovation, which are critical for competitiveness. For employees, it can be both a survival mechanism and a silent protest against unmet expectations. Renee Thomas’s story provides a vivid illustration of how quiet quitting evolves from early enthusiasm to subtle disengagement and eventual resignation. His experience is shaped by a mix of individual motivation, peer dynamics, leadership behaviour, and organisational culture.

This case is important for managers and HR professionals because it highlights the systemic nature of disengagement and underlines that quiet quitting is not an isolated individual problem but a reflection of organisational health. Key Drivers of Quiet Quitting in Modern Workplaces:

- Lack of recognition and appreciation
- Poor leadership and unclear career growth pathways
- Increasing workplace stress without proportional reward
- Toxic organisational culture and peer politics
- Work-life balance challenges, amplified by remote work and pandemic-era shifts

For younger employees, especially in high-pressure sectors like IT, quiet quitting often emerges as a coping mechanism to manage burnout and stress while avoiding direct conflict. These employees continue to perform at the baseline level to safeguard their job but no longer invest discretionary effort, creativity, or emotional commitment to the organisation.

This case focuses on Renee Thomas; a talented software engineer whose early career exemplifies the promise and potential of a highly engaged employee. Renee’s journey from enthusiasm and high performance to quiet quitting and eventual resignation illustrates the interplay of organisational culture, leadership behaviour, peer dynamics, and recognition mechanisms in shaping employee engagement. By analysing Renee’s experience, this case study aims to

- Highlight the organisational and interpersonal triggers for quiet quitting.
- Examine the early warning signs of disengagement.
- Explore the impact of workplace culture and leadership style on retention of high-potential employees.

Provide evidence-based insights for preventing quiet quitting.

II. BACKGROUND OF RENEE THOMAS

Renee Thomas was born in a mid-sized Indian city. From an early age, he demonstrated a keen interest in technology and problem-solving. Excelling in

mathematics and computer science, Renee pursued a degree in Information Technology Engineering, graduating in 2016 from a reputed technical university. During his academic years, Renee engaged in internships and projects that gave him exposure to real-world IT challenges. His final year project, involving a web-based enterprise solution for local businesses, earned him recognition from faculty and industry evaluators. This solid foundation in both technical skills and practical problem-solving set Renee apart as he entered the professional world.

Industry Context

The IT industry is characterised by rapid change, high competition, and intense project-based work. Companies rely heavily on talented engineers like Renee to deliver client value. However, the industry also faces challenges such as:

High attrition rates — frequent movement of skilled employees between firms.

Burnout — long working hours, demanding clients, and shifting deadlines.

Skill gaps — the need for constant up skilling to match technology trends.

Against this backdrop, organisations need to maintain high engagement levels to retain talent. Renee's journey illustrates what happens when these needs are ignored.

2.2 Early Career Aspirations

For Renee, joining a multinational IT services company was a dream come true. He saw it as an opportunity to work with global clients, learn new technologies, and establish himself as a competent professional. His motivation was driven by:

- Desire to prove his technical capability.
- Commitment to client satisfaction.
- Ambition to advance quickly in his career.

2.3 First Role: Software Developer in a Multinational IT Services Company

Soon after graduation, Renee was recruited by one of India's leading IT firms. His first assignment was with a German client project a complex engagement involving the development and maintenance of enterprise software systems. This assignment required not only technical competence but also effective communication skills to align deliverables with client expectations.

Renee's initial months were marked by:

Fast learning curve: Quickly mastering the client's systems and project requirements.

- Proactive communication: Regularly updating the client, clarifying doubts, and offering improvements.
- High-quality delivery: Meeting deadlines, maintaining high code quality, and troubleshooting issues effectively.
- His dedication and professionalism earned him praise from both the client and internal project stakeholders.

2.4 Key Qualities of Renee in Early Career

Renee demonstrated several key strengths in his early years

Enthusiasm for Learning: Eager to take on challenging assignments, often going beyond assigned tasks to acquire new skills.

- a. Analytical Thinking: Strong problem-solving abilities, capable of diagnosing complex technical issues.
- b. Client Relationship Management: Building trust through transparency and proactive communication.
- c. Attention to Detail: Ensuring deliverables met high-quality standards.
- d. Commitment and Reliability: Punctuality in meetings, delivering within deadlines, and maintaining a professional approach.

2.5 Early Recognition

Renee's work on the German client project did not go unnoticed. His ability to combine technical excellence with communication skills won him accolades from the client, who specifically recommended him for a leadership role in the next phase of the engagement. For Renee, this was a milestone a validation of his hard work and a stepping stone toward his career ambitions.

III. CASE NARRATIVE (EXPANDED)

3.1 Early Success: The Launchpad

Renee's first year at the company was marked by steady achievements. He completed his assigned tasks successfully and won the trust of the client and the organisation. His professional demeanour and problem-solving approach made him stand out in a competitive environment.

The German client's nomination of Renee for a leadership role in the next project was a defining moment. This nomination symbolised not only client trust but also a potential shift in Renee's career trajectory. He was seen as a young leader with promise someone who could bridge technical excellence with leadership skills. For the organisation, this was an opportunity to showcase their ability to nurture talent. However, this recognition also sowed the seeds of internal resistance.

3.2 Rising Resentment among Peers

While Renee's recognition was celebrated externally, internally it generated friction. Senior team members who had been with the organisation longer perceived this as an oversight of their contributions. They questioned whether a relatively new entrant should be elevated to a leadership role ahead of them. Although there were no formal objections during meetings, resentment began to surface in subtle ways:

- a) Exclusion from discussions: Renee found himself left out of informal decision-making conversations.
- b) Undermining work: His suggestions were questioned disproportionately, even when based on solid logic.
- c) Reduced collaboration: Some team members became less willing to assist him with complex issues.

This simmering hostility reflected a deeper organisational issue — a lack of transparent recognition mechanisms and absence of a strong culture of mentorship.

3.3 Internal Sabotage

Before the project began, Renee was aligned under a senior project lead to gain exposure to project management. Ideally, this would be an opportunity for mentoring. However, the senior lead felt threatened by Renee's nomination and responded with undermining behaviour rather than support.

Examples of sabotaging behaviour included:

- Dismissing Renee's suggestions without proper review.
- Publicly undermining his contributions in team meetings.
- Humiliating him in front of peers, questioning his capabilities.

Other senior members, rather than intervening constructively, supported this passive resistance, creating a hostile environment for Renee. This was exacerbated by the organisation's lack of intervention to mediate tensions.

3.4 Emotional Decline: From Enthusiasm to Withdrawal

These workplace dynamics had a significant psychological impact on Renee. The once passionate and proactive engineer began to experience a gradual erosion of motivation and self-confidence. Signs of disengagement became apparent:

Missing meetings: He increasingly avoided internal stakeholder discussions.

Withdrawal from teamwork: Limited interaction with peers outside mandatory tasks.

Reduced initiative: Rarely volunteering new ideas or process improvements.

Loss of enthusiasm: Decline in proactive problem-solving.

Despite continued trust from the client, Renee felt unsupported within his own organisation. The absence of mentorship, peer hostility, and lack of recognition created a toxic work environment.

3.5 Quiet Quitting Phase

An external delay in the client's project extended Renee's idle time for six months. Without active engagement or meaningful work, Renee's disengagement deepened. He maintained the minimum expectations of his role logging in, completing assigned tasks but stopped investing discretionary effort or creativity.

This phase marked quiet quitting: a subtle withdrawal from proactive engagement while continuing to perform the core job functions.

3.6 Resignation

After nearly ten months of emotional struggle four months of hostility and six months of inactivity Renee decided to resign. His departure was a loss to the organisation and a cautionary tale about how quickly engagement can be eroded when organisational culture fails to nurture talent.

Renee's journey underscores that quiet quitting is not merely a personal choice but the result of a series of organisational failures: lack of recognition, absence of leadership support, poor conflict resolution, and a culture that tolerates toxic behaviour.

3.7 The Turning Point: From Engagement to Disengagement

The turning point in Renee's journey came soon after his nomination as project lead. While the external recognition boosted his morale, internally it became a source of tension. The organisation did not provide Renee with structured support to transition into leadership.

The lack of formal mentorship and open communication channels created a vacuum, which toxic peer politics quickly filled. Senior colleagues, feeling overlooked, resorted to undermining behaviours rather than constructive dialogue.

This phase marks the subtle shift from high engagement to gradual disengagement. Renee's withdrawal was not abrupt; it evolved over several months as workplace hostility and neglect took their toll.

3.8 Dynamics of Toxic Workplace Culture

Organisational culture plays a pivotal role in how employees react to recognition and promotion. In Renee's case, the culture lacked:

Transparent promotion criteria unclear rationale for leadership appointments.

Recognition mechanisms absence of systems to celebrate internal achievements.

Conflict resolution structures no formal channels to address peer resentment.

These cultural gaps allowed subtle hostility to persist. The lack of intervention signalled to Renee that his contributions were undervalued internally, even if clients appreciated his work.

3.9 Emotional Decline and Quiet Quitting

Renee's emotional journey can be broken into distinct stages:

Stage 1 — Enthusiasm: First year marked by proactive engagement and high performance.

Stage 2 — Subtle Disengagement: Increased exclusion from team discussions, reduced initiative.

Stage 3 — Active Withdrawal: Avoiding meetings, delivering minimal work, no extra effort.

Stage 4 — Quiet Quitting: Meeting only contractual obligations without emotional involvement.

Research in organisational psychology shows that disengagement often follows such a trajectory when organisational support is absent. Renee's case is an example of this pattern.

3.10 Resignation: The Cost of Neglect

After nearly ten months of disengagement, Renee tendered his resignation. His departure represented not just the loss of a skilled engineer but the loss of potential future leadership.

For the organisation, the resignation exposed critical gaps in:

Leadership readiness absence of mentoring for emerging leaders.

Engagement monitoring inability to detect early disengagement signals.

Conflict resolution failure to address peer resentment effectively.

Renee's resignation also risked damaging the client relationship, as he had built strong trust with the German client.

V. ANALYSIS OF THE CASE

1. Summary of the Case

Renee Thomas, a talented IT engineer, began his career with high enthusiasm, strong technical skills, and an ability to deliver exceptional client value. Early recognition, particularly from a German client, positioned him for leadership. However, internal peer resentment, toxic leadership, lack of recognition, and organisational neglect created a hostile work environment. Over time, Renee transitioned through stages of engagement to subtle withdrawal and ultimately resignation a classic example of quiet quitting.

This case illustrates how organisational culture, leadership behaviour, peer dynamics, and recognition mechanisms interact to influence employee engagement and retention.

2. Key Issues in the Case

The core issues in Renee's case are:

2.1 Individual Level

- **Loss of Meaningfulness:** Renee's contribution was not recognised internally despite client appreciation.
- **Emotional Exhaustion:** Hostility and lack of support reduced emotional availability for the work.
- **Declining Motivation:** Withdrawal from proactive engagement as a coping mechanism.

2.2 Team Level

- Peer Resentment: Promotion of Renee created insecurity among senior peers, leading to undermining behaviour.
- Exclusionary Practices: Renee was side lined from decision-making, which reduced his influence and contribution.
- Absence of Mentorship: The senior lead who should have supported Renee instead undermined him.

2.3 Organisational Level

- Lack of Transparent Recognition: Internal reward systems did not align with client feedback.
- Absence of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: No proactive intervention to address hostility or team politics.
- Idle Time: Project delays without productive reallocation contributed to disengagement.
- Leadership Gaps: Absence of emotional intelligence in leadership and inadequate career growth pathways.

3. Causes of Quiet Quitting in Renee's Case

The case reveals multiple, interconnected causes:

Cause Evidence from Case

Lack of Peer Support Exclusion from discussions, undermining suggestions

Toxic Leadership Project lead's insecurity, humiliation in public meetings

Absence of Organisational Intervention No mediation despite clear conflict

Idle Periods Six months without meaningful engagement

Recognition Gap External praise not matched internally

4. Signs of Quiet Quitting

1. Renee displayed the typical behavioural markers of quiet quitting:
2. Withdrawal from meetings and collaborative discussions.
3. Reduced proactive problem-solving and idea generation.
4. Compliance with only core role responsibilities.
5. Emotional disengagement despite fulfilling work duties.

These signs align with engagement models such as Kahn's (1990), where meaningfulness, safety, and availability deteriorate under toxic conditions.

5. Organisational Implications

5.1 Talent Retention

Losing a high-potential employee like Renee reduces leadership pipeline readiness.

Loss of trust among other employees who witness unaddressed hostility.

5.2 Client Relationship

Risk of eroding client trust when a preferred point of contact leaves.

5.3 Productivity and Innovation

Quiet quitting reduces discretionary effort and innovation.

Extended idle time due to project delays represents lost productivity.

5.4 Cultural Impact

Unaddressed peer resentment and toxic leadership erode organisational health.

Signals to other employees that hostility and exclusion go unchecked.

Theoretical Analysis

To understand Renee's case, we can draw on several organisational behaviour and HR theories:

1 Kahn's Engagement Theory

Kahn (1990) defined engagement as the psychological presence of employees in their roles, influenced by meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Renee's decline in engagement reflects a loss in all three dimensions:

Meaningfulness: Undermined by lack of recognition and support.

Safety: Eroded by hostile peer behaviour and lack of conflict resolution.

Availability: Reduced by emotional fatigue and disillusionment.

2 Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg distinguishes between hygiene factors (salary, working conditions) and motivators (recognition, achievement). Renee's case shows that even if hygiene factors are adequate, absence of motivators like recognition and growth opportunities can cause disengagement.

3 Psychological Contract Theory

Renee's experience reflects a breach of the psychological contract the unspoken expectations between employee and employer. While he expected mentorship, recognition, and career growth, the organisation failed to deliver. This breach accelerated his disengagement.

Causes Of Quiet Quitting in Renee's Case

A detailed analysis reveals multiple intertwined causes:

Lack of Peer Support: Senior colleagues' resentment created an unsupportive work environment.

Toxic Leadership: The project lead's insecurity translated into undermining behaviour.

Absence of Organisational Intervention: No mechanisms to detect or address internal conflict.

Delayed Client Project: Long idle periods reduced engagement opportunities.

Recognition Gap: External recognition from clients was not reinforced internally.

VI. SIGNS OF QUIET QUITTING DISPLAYED BY RENEE

- Renee's disengagement followed clear behavioural patterns:
- Reduced participation in meetings.
- Withdrawal from team interactions.
- Declining initiative and ownership.
- Minimum compliance with role requirements.

These signs align with organisational research showing that quiet quitting often begins with subtle behavioural changes before becoming overt.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ORGANISATION

The impact of Renee's disengagement and resignation is multi-layered:

Loss of Talent: A high-potential employee exited prematurely.

Client Relationship Risk: Loss of a trusted leader could undermine client confidence.

Cultural Toxicity: Failure to address hostility signals tolerance for toxic behaviours.

Productivity Costs: Months of disengagement reduce project efficiency and innovation.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Renee Thomas's journey from a passionate, high-performing software engineer to a disengaged employee who quietly exited his role is a powerful illustration of how organisational culture, leadership practices, and peer dynamics converge to influence employee engagement. Quiet quitting, as evidenced in this case, is not merely an individual choice it is the outcome of systemic organisational shortcomings that erode motivation, commitment, and trust over time.

The case underscores several critical insights:

Employee Engagement is Fragile Engagement begins with recognition, meaningful work, and trust. Renee's early career success was fuelled by these factors, but the absence of sustained organisational support and recognition caused a steady decline in engagement.

Quiet Quitting as a Gradual Process Renee's disengagement unfolded in stages, starting with subtle behavioural changes and culminating in complete emotional withdrawal. This highlights that quiet quitting is not sudden but a gradual erosion of connection to the work and organisation.

Leadership and Culture are Key Drivers the lack of transparent promotion processes, absence of mentoring, poor conflict resolution, and tolerance for toxic behaviour created a workplace where disengagement could thrive. Leadership behaviour directly shapes employees' psychological safety and sense of meaning both of which are essential for sustained engagement.

The Organisational Cost of Neglect Renee's resignation resulted in a loss of talent, diminished client trust, and the erosion of organisational morale. Quiet quitting is a hidden productivity cost that often precedes turnover and damages organisational reputation if left unaddressed.

The Psychological Contract Renee's case shows that disengagement often stems from a breach of the psychological contract the unspoken expectations between the employer and employee. When recognition, growth opportunities, and support are absent, employees feel undervalued and begin withdrawing effort.

A Wake-Up Call for Organisations quiet quitting should be understood not as an isolated employee behaviour but as a signal of organisational health. It

reflects broader challenges in leadership, culture, and HR systems.

Ultimately, Renee's story is a cautionary tale. It reminds organisations that attracting talent is only half the battle; retaining it requires consistent effort, empathy, and proactive engagement strategies. Organisations must cultivate an environment where employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to contribute beyond the bare minimum.

Key takeaway: Preventing quiet quitting requires a systemic approach one that combines transparent recognition systems, structured mentoring, emotional intelligence in leadership, conflict resolution mechanisms, and continuous engagement monitoring. Organisations that prioritise these elements can transform quiet quitting from a silent threat into an opportunity for cultural renewal and sustained performance excellence.

In the end, Renee Thomas's journey is not just about one individual's experience it is a mirror reflecting the collective responsibility of leaders, HR professionals, and organisations to build workplaces where passion thrives and silence never becomes the final response to disengagement.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

To prevent similar cases, organisations should:

- a) Introduce Formal Mentorship Programs: Especially for emerging leaders.
- b) Establish Transparent Recognition Systems: Ensure internal recognition matches external feedback.
- c) Train Leaders in Emotional Intelligence: To manage teams empathetically.
- d) Implement Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: Detect and address workplace hostility early.
- e) Monitor Engagement Levels: Use surveys, feedback sessions, and one-on-one check-ins.
- f) Prevent Idle Periods: Keep employees engaged with meaningful work.

X. CASE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Understanding the Case

1. What were the key factors that contributed to Renee Thomas's initial success in his career?
2. What organizational and interpersonal issues led to Renee's disengagement?

3. How did peer jealousy and toxic leadership play a role in Renee's quiet quitting?

Analysis & Reflection

1. What signs of quiet quitting did Renee display, and how could the organization have identified them earlier?
2. In what ways did the organization's lack of intervention worsen the situation?
3. How did delayed client projects and idle periods contribute to disengagement?

Implications for the Organization

1. What were the short-term and long-term impacts of Renee's resignation on the organization and client relationship?
2. How did the organizational culture enable or ignore toxic behaviour within the team?
3. What lessons can HR and leadership take away from this case?

Application & Solutions

1. If you were the HR manager in this situation, what actions would you have taken to retain Renee?
2. What strategies can organizations adopt to prevent quiet quitting among high-potential employees?
3. How can mentoring, recognition, and conflict resolution practices strengthen employee engagement in competitive industries like IT?

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