NEWS LESSON

Is Leaving on Time Really Doing Too Little?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What does doing a job well look like when you leave on time?
2. Would you answer a routine work message on a day off?
3. When does helping out become an expectation?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**ambiguity**	☐	A	strong loyalty and hard work for something
2	**disengaging**	☐	B	a lack of clarity, so that something can mean more than one thing
3	**misleading**	☐	C	connected with how a business runs day to day
4	**dedication**	☐	D	morally good
5	**counterargument**	☐	E	slowly losing interest and pulling away
6	**transparent**	☐	F	a reason given against an opinion
7	**virtuous**	☐	G	open, so that everyone can see how something works
8	**operational**	☐	H	giving the wrong idea

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Is leaving on time a lack of ambition or a reasonable boundary? Gallup's 2026 engagement figures add context, but they do not count quiet quitters.

1 One employee finishes the agreed work and leaves on time. A manager sees a lack of ambition; the employee sees a reasonable boundary. Much of the argument about quiet quitting begins with that difference. The phrase can mean doing a job properly within its hours, or it can mean quietly disengaging. Those are different situations.

2 The label is provocative partly because it suggests that an employee has withdrawn something they previously owed. Yet the boundary between contractual obligation and voluntary goodwill is rarely made explicit.

3 Despite its name, quiet quitting does not involve resignation. It is an imprecise label applied to behaviours ranging from sensible boundary-setting to genuine disengagement. That ambiguity matters, because a person who works conscientiously for their contracted hours may be unfairly grouped with somebody who has stopped taking their responsibilities seriously.

4 There is a broader context. Gallup's 2026 global workplace report estimated that just 20% of employees were engaged in 2025. Engagement measures employees' psychological connection to their work and organisation; it is not a direct count of quiet quitters. Treating the figures as interchangeable would create a misleading picture of modern employment. Managers who celebrate staff for 'going the extra mile' may genuinely appreciate dedication. Problems arise when exceptional effort quietly becomes the baseline against which everybody else is judged.

5 Employers make a reasonable point when they value initiative, generosity and adaptability. Teams rarely function well if everybody insists that unforeseen problems belong to somebody else. Yet the counterargument is equally significant: when exceptional effort becomes routine, organisations may be benefiting from an invisible extension of the working week.

6 A further complication is unequal bargaining power. Highly paid professionals may negotiate flexible hours, while staff in insecure or low-paid roles risk punishment for refusing extra work. Advice to 'set boundaries' is less useful when an employee cannot afford to lose their job. This is not an argument for rigidly refusing every unexpected request. It is an argument for making the costs of flexibility visible, including whose time is being given up.

7 There are important differences between sectors that the popular debate tends to obscure. In professional office work, boundaries may primarily concern unanswered evening emails. In transport, retail or emergency services, unexpected demands can arise while staff are physically present and customers need assistance. A fair policy should consider those operational realities without treating workers' personal time as an infinitely available resource.

8 Compensated overtime, reliable staffing and transparent arrangements for exceptional circumstances can distinguish legitimate flexibility from the normalisation of overwork. The concept of quiet quitting can otherwise become a convenient accusation levelled at employees who refuse to pick up the slack for organisational failures. Conversely, an employee's right to boundaries does not remove responsibilities towards colleagues or the people who depend on a service. The challenge is to negotiate commitments that are both humane and workable.

9 Perhaps the debate should move beyond deciding whether quiet quitting is virtuous or lazy. It raises a more practical question about the unwritten contract between organisations and their staff. Sustainable commitment depends not just on individual motivation but also on fairness, trust and an honest agreement about what a job actually requires.

Sources: Gallup. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer implies that a worker in a low-paid role may find it harder to set boundaries than a well-paid one. T F NG
2. The writer treats Gallup's 20% figure as an estimate of how many employees are quiet quitting. T F NG
3. Gallup found that engagement was lower in retail than in office work. T F NG
4. Praise for going the extra mile can become a problem if it changes what counts as normal effort. T F NG
5. The writer says most workplaces clearly separate contractual duties from voluntary goodwill. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

baseline **conscientiously** **legitimate** **levelled** **obscure** **reinforce** **scrupulous** **sustainable**

1. The new targets treated last year's best sales figures as the _____ , so ordinary performance began to look like failure.
2. Vague job descriptions can _____ who is really responsible for what.
3. Refusing to answer emails at midnight is a _____ request, not a sign of laziness.
4. Although she worked _____ within her contracted hours, her manager still judged her unambitious.
5. Working sixty hours a week is not a _____ pace to keep up for years.
6. Accusations of laziness are often _____ at staff who cannot afford to complain.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The label is _____ because it implies something has been withdrawn. (PROVOKE)
2. Engagement and quiet quitting are not _____ terms, although people often confuse them. (INTERCHANGE)
3. Branding a worker as lazy because of one late email is an unfair _____ . (ACCUSE)
4. Engagement measures employees' _____ connection to their work and organisation. (PSYCHOLOGY)
5. Reliable staffing can separate legitimate flexibility from the _____ of overwork. (NORMAL)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some linkers join two clauses, some need a noun phrase, and some add a result or a contrast across a full stop. Read the whole sentence with your answer in place.

albeit **conversely** **hence** **insofar** **notwithstanding** **thereby** **whereas**

1. The policy was popular with staff, _____ not with every manager.
2. _____ the clear rules, several managers kept sending messages at midnight.
3. Highly paid staff can negotiate their hours, _____ low-paid staff often cannot.
4. Employers benefit when staff feel valued. _____ , staff who feel exploited tend to withdraw effort.
5. Overtime was never recorded; _____ , the true length of the working week stayed invisible.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Where would you draw the line between being reliable and always being available?
2. Should doing exactly the agreed job ever count as doing too little?
3. What could make people want to contribute more without feeling pressured?

9 Role-play: leaving on time

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the manager

Your employee leaves at five every day and never answers messages in the evening. A big project starts next week. Ask why, and say what you need from the team. You can ask for a small change, or accept the way they work.

Student B · the employee

You finish your tasks and leave on time. Your manager wants to talk. Explain why your evenings matter to you. Say what you can offer instead, and what you cannot do.

Useful phrases

I always finish my tasks before I leave.

I'm afraid I'm not available in the evenings.

Can you tell me what you're expecting?

I'd be happy to stay late once a month if it's paid.

That's fair, but we've got a busy week coming.

Could we agree some clear rules?

Afterwards, tell the class what you agreed. Was it a fair deal for both sides?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 B · 2 E · 3 H · 4 A · 5 F · 6 G · 7 D · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 baseline · 2 obscure · 3 legitimate · 4 conscientiously · 5 sustainable · 6 levelled

6 Word forms

1 provocative · 2 interchangeable · 3 accusation · 4 psychological · 5 normalisation or normalization

7 Language focus

1 albeit · 2 Notwithstanding · 3 whereas · 4 Conversely · 5 hence

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