NEWS LESSON

Leaving on Time: What Does a Job Really Expect?



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	**disengagement**	☐	A	being ready to change plans easily
2	**flexibility**	☐	B	taking something in and dealing with it
3	**workloads**	☐	C	a discussion to reach an agreement
4	**sacrifice**	☐	D	something you give up to get something more important
5	**dependable**	☐	E	the amounts of work people have to do
6	**negotiation**	☐	F	a bad feeling when you think you did something wrong
7	**absorbing**	☐	G	losing interest and no longer caring about something
8	**guilt**	☐	H	someone you can trust to do what they promise

3 Read

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

One manager calls an employee who leaves on time dependable; another calls the same person a quiet quitter. Gallup's 2026 engagement figures are not a count of quiet quitters.

1 Imagine an employee who performs their duties carefully but refuses to check messages after hours. One manager might describe that person as dependable and sensible. Another might claim they are quiet quitting. The difference says a great deal about changing expectations in the workplace. Despite the dramatic label, quiet quitting usually means remaining employed while rejecting the idea that success requires constant extra effort. It became a popular phrase as workers debated work-life balance, unpaid overtime and whether their careers deserved such a large share of their energy.

2 The discussion takes place against a wider problem of employee disengagement. Gallup's 2026 State of the Global Workplace report found that 20% of employees worldwide were engaged in 2025. However, its categories of engagement are not the same as quiet quitting, and people can be committed to their work without being available every evening.

3 From an employer's perspective, initiative and flexibility matter. Businesses sometimes face unexpected problems, and colleagues depend on one another. But if absorbing additional responsibilities becomes a permanent requirement, workers may reasonably ask why those duties are not included in their pay or job description. The phrase also travels badly between workplaces. In a team where overtime is rare, doing your contracted hours sounds unremarkable. In another, the same behaviour might be treated as disloyalty.

4 There is also a difference between healthy boundaries and withdrawing effort. A person who completes agreed tasks well and finishes on time has not necessarily stopped caring. By contrast, someone who avoids responsibilities or leaves colleagues to solve every problem may damage both relationships and results.

5 The meaning of a reasonable boundary also varies dramatically between professions. An office employee may be able to switch off notifications at the end of the day, while a healthcare worker may face an emergency just before a shift finishes. That does not mean one group deserves unlimited protection and the other unlimited demands. Predictability, compensation and staffing levels help determine whether flexibility feels like cooperation or exploitation.

6 Employers who rely routinely on unpaid overtime may be using workers' goodwill to paper over problems that require proper investment. Equally, employees who join a team need to recognise that occasional unexpected responsibilities are difficult to eliminate entirely. A healthy workplace makes those trade-offs explicit rather than relying on guilt, vague expectations or assumptions about what committed workers should sacrifice.

7 The phrase quiet quitting turns a complicated negotiation into an argument about attitude. A more useful discussion might concern fair workloads, realistic expectations and whether employees have any influence over how their jobs are organised. Commitment should not have to mean being permanently on call.

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 same behaviour can be praised in one workplace and criticised in another. T F NG
2. The writer says healthcare workers deserve unlimited protection, but office staff do not. T F NG
3. Gallup found that engagement had fallen since the previous year. T F NG
4. A worker can care about the job and still refuse to check messages in the evening. T F NG
5. The writer says employees should never expect unplanned duties. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

boundaries **compensation** **eliminate** **influence** **permanent** **perspective** **unlimited** **vague**

1. From a customer's _____ , a shop that closes early can feel unhelpful.
2. The manager said the extra shifts were only for this month, not a _____ change.
3. No company can _____ every unexpected problem, but good planning can reduce them.
4. The contract was so _____ that nobody knew which tasks were included.
5. Workers who stay late often expect _____ , such as extra pay or time off.
6. Staff should have some _____ over how their jobs are organised.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time the manager replied, the employee _____ the office. (LEAVE)
2. Extra tasks _____ to staff every week without extra pay. (GIVE)
3. If the manager asked politely, many staff _____ later. (STAY)
4. Since the debate began, many workers _____ to ask what their jobs really include. (START)
5. Last month, a colleague _____ , so the team had more work. (RESIGN)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Check what follows the gap: a full clause, a noun phrase, or a new sentence after a semicolon. Then check the logic.

although	despite	nevertheless	otherwise	provided	unless	whereas

1. Some staff reply to messages at night, _____ others switch their phones off at six.
2. The firm can only keep its best staff _____ it treats them fairly.
3. _____ the extra hours were unpaid, most of the team agreed to stay.
4. _____ the heavy workload, she left on time.
5. Rules must be clear; _____ , workers will guess what is expected.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 perspective · 2 permanent · 3 eliminate · 4 vague · 5 compensation · 6 influence

6 Verb forms

1 had left · 2 are given · 3 would stay or 'd stay or might stay or could stay · 4 have started · 5 resigned

7 Language focus

1 whereas · 2 provided · 3 Although · 4 Despite · 5 otherwise

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