



Spc. Dylan Nice, a U.S. Army Reserve watercraft engineer Soldier from the 949th Transportation Company, a unit which specializes in watercraft operations, cargo and watercraft engineering, poses for a series of portraits on board a Logistics Support Vessel in Baltimore, Md., on April 7-8, 2017. Imagine Spc. Nice telling platoon sergeants that unit photos aren't tasks the Army pays them for. (U.S. Army Reserve photo by Master Sgt. Michel Sauret)

What if Soldiers Acted Their “Wage?”

By 1st Sgt. Anthony J. Burroughs

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Imagine privates first class telling platoon sergeants that preparing for and going to Soldier of the month boards aren't tasks the Army pays them for. What if newly-minted lieutenants claimed going to a non-duty hour leaders' social event is not a paid-for responsibility?

The term “quiet quitting” is taking the social media world by storm. Like many social media phenomena, the practice has a real-world impact. To many, “quiet quitting” or “acting your wage,” is just doing what employers compensate you for. However, the business world has already responded with leaders for and

against this practice.

In an Aug. 19, 2022, NPR article, Ed Zitron, a media leader responsible for Where's Your Ed At, claimed, “If you want people to go 'above and beyond,' compensate them for it. Give them \$200. Pay them for the extra work,” (Kilpatrick, 2022, para. 4). In counterpoint, in a LinkedIn post, Arianna Huffington, a leader of Thrive Global, wrote, “Quiet quitting isn't just about quitting on a job, it's a step toward quitting on life” (Huffington, 2022, para. 2).

The subject is proving to be contentious. As a sergeant

first class in the Army with 14 years of experience, and as a modern-day drill sergeant who has fulfilled many leadership roles, I had to ask myself, “What happens when Soldiers do this?”

The challenge of leading a multi-generational force is more difficult than ever. However, “quiet quitting” has become a cross-generational practice we feel even more as the Army resumes near to normal post-COVID operations. Also, to add to the issue, the current economic environment has made Soldiers’ dollars much weaker.

It feels like housing costs have generally increased, food costs have maintained an upward trend and the quality of services provided by Army facilities, like healthcare, have decreased. I’ve seen some increases in basic allowances for housing, per diem entitlements, and financial preparedness resources. But is it enough to prevent “quiet quitting”?

In a 2020 *Approaches to Changing Military Compensation*, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) publication claimed,

[Block Quote] “Cash compensation for service members, including nontaxable allowances for housing and food and the associated federal tax savings, exceeds in most cases DoD’s benchmark, which is equal to the 70th percentile of wages and salaries for comparable civilians, often by a significant amount.” (p. ii)

It’s interesting to note this “comparable civilian” standard is generally a high school graduate for enlisted and a college graduate for officers. The analysis didn’t include accumulated technical ability or hours worked.

And then, I thought there was the noncash compensation like childcare, schools, healthcare, and the commissary. But the CBO surprised me and, in the same report, noted, “However, noncash benefits are valued less highly by young people and by those living away from military installations, and many deferred benefits accrue only to the small minority of service members who complete a military career” (p.2).

As an NCO, I give Soldiers purpose, motivation, and direction. If I’m confronted with a “quiet quitting” Soldier who “acts the wage” of a 19-year-old high school graduate working at a fast food restaurant unable to see noncash benefits as incentives to go above and beyond, what’s next?

Our Oath, the Army Values, our Creeds, our history,



Pfc. Dakota Young (right), Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 3rd Brigade, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne (Air Assault), answers questions, while his mentor, Staff Sgt. Wendell McRae (left), monitors his progress during a Soldier of the Month board at Forward Operating Base Lightning, Paktya Province, Afghanistan, Feb. 22, 2013. The term “quiet quitting” is taking the social media world by storm. Like many social media phenomena, the practice has a real-world impact. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Aaron Ricca)

and our purpose are enough. They were enough for me. But are they enough for the decreased number of enlistees joining today? The mantle of fighting and winning our nation’s wars is facing the challenge of modern-day questions:

“Is burning myself out and increasing my stress level worth it?”

“Does putting my family second set me up for success?”

“Does the Army care about me or just my output?”

I believe there’s no one way to address this challenge. Every Soldier is different. Leaders must move beyond the logical and lawful orders and truly show they care. And in the face of the stark data, we have to say, “So what?!” Vietnam, Korea, Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

We volunteered to join a force that stands in the gap to stop chaos and ruin. We may not always be appreciated or even paid for the time, families, or lives lost, but someone must do it. If not us, then who? “Quiet quitting” is leaving the gap unfilled and failing our mission.

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