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The original outplacement company



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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Can Surveillance Stymie Quiet Quitting?

*Some workers find the current technology intrusive and dystopian, but what if the data collected empowered both employees and their bosses?*

**CHICAGO, September 7, 2022** – Worker demand for fully-remote or hybrid work arrangements is shining a spotlight on workplace surveillance technology, while employers grapple with engagement issues, also known as “quiet quitting.” Though employers implemented many forms of surveillance decades ago, newer technology, particularly that which utilizes web cameras, is creating comparisons to a dystopian nightmare, and critics report it measures the wrong inputs to gauge success. However, as the technology evolves, and good leaders come to understand what to measure and how to use and share the data, workers can harness it to advocate for their careers, potentially leading to more engagement and better outcomes for both worker and employer, according to one workplace authority.

“In a still-tight labor market, workers have power to push back on employers who want to call them back to offices. Metrics that guarantee worker productivity are one way to allow remote work to continue,” said Andrew Challenger, Senior Vice President of outplacement and executive coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

“Ultimately, ‘quiet quitting’ - doing just the bare essentials of a job - will not advance anyone’s career. Workers need to forge relationships, both internally and externally, and that typically requires going outside of one’s role, assuming other responsibilities to gain skills necessary to achieve personal and corporate goals. If workers can point to surveillance data to help bolster their argument for promotions or raises, this may actually re-engage workers,” said Challenger.

“If surveillance is going to be effective, it must maintain trust between employer and employee, measure only the important elements necessary to do the job, and allow workers upward mobility based on the data collected. It is imperative leaders decide what they will measure, how it will be shared, and what incentives they will offer workers who reach goals,” he added.

Like everything in the office, surveillance has evolved. Video and phone call surveillance has been in place for decades, particularly in call centers and warehouses. Keystroke tracking became prevalent in the late-1990s. Site-blocking and email-reading software has been developed and implemented over the last decade.

Now, surveillance can involve taking snapshots or video through workers’ laptop cameras, sometimes constantly. Employers can also track whereabouts through company-issued smart phones or other wearable devices.

### **PRIVACY CONCERNS**

“Surveillance used to be done by managers in the office. Now that workers are demanding and being offered remote options, it’s not surprising employers want to ensure their teams are working. The problem lies in part, in how this data is being collected and used,” said Challenger.

“Human managers did not take and retain screen shots and web camera photos of their teams and their work in the past. Just like with all sensitive personal information, how this data is secured is important,” he added.

“If leaders are going to begin surveilling workers in such a tight labor market, they must ensure workers feel trusted and have some control over what is collected and shared or risk losing their talent,” he said.

### **EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES & ENGAGEMENT**

Workers are at odds over return-to-work (RTO) policies, just as their employers are. Many workers do not have the option to work remotely. Leaders at companies with both full-time in-person and remote staff report issues with fairness between the two categories of workers.

“Many in-person workers have had their movements tracked just by the nature of their positions. Employers now must deal with attitudes of those who must come into the office to do their jobs and have always been tracked, and their coworkers who get to work remotely and are pushing back on any kind of tracking,” said Challenger.

In a new Challenger survey of 172 companies of various sizes and industries, 88% reported they have remote work options for part of their workforces, with just 13% reporting most of their employees are in person, while another 12% have no remote options. Meanwhile, 85% of

companies are actively hiring, and 76% are having difficulty filling roles, 39% of which report they are having issues filling in-person roles, specifically.

“Employers are aware of their teams’ burnout and know that flexible or remote options can help alleviate this burden. On the other side of that is accountability from the employee,” said Challenger.

### **CAREER TRAJECTORY**

Surveillance can work for both sides, Challenger says, particularly if the data being collected helps workers advance in their careers. According to the Challenger survey, 71% of respondents rated upward career trajectory as very important or the highest priority for their team members.

“The lack of engagement employers are witnessing from their teams occurs when workers do not feel valued. Good leaders are able to assess what they witness – attendance, work ethic, and output, included – to praise and reward workers. Surveillance is attempting to do the same thing,” said Challenger.

“Employers who are surveilling their teams, may want to reward the good data and not penalize workers, particularly now, in a tight labor market when companies are still having trouble hiring,” he added.

### **WHAT ABOUT CULTURE?**

A major issue concerning employers about remote work is the deterioration of company culture. Though AI can track typing on a keyboard and whether a person is at their computer, it typically does not track any social interactions between co-workers.

“Watercooler discussions do not happen easily with remote workers. During the pandemic, companies attempted virtual happy hours or other Zoom events to gather their teams. In the post-pandemic, many of these events have gone back in-person, but the chitchat, mentoring, or hallway banter that happens in offices, and that help create and define company culture, is lacking in remote-only and some hybrid environments,” said Challenger.

This issue ultimately comes down to leadership, but leaders could use data to keep an inventory of these interactions, or a “social score.” Workers who call to check on their co-workers, set up in-person or virtual coffee meetings or meals, text or chat about their lives, could have a separate score that would inform pay raises or promotions.

“Well-connected employees are often seen as leaders in their companies and keep managers abreast of what’s happening with their teams. It’s just as important as deliverables or productivity,” said Challenger.

## **THE FUTURE OF TRACKING**

Challenger predicts this surveillance will evolve over the next decade to include not just tracking productivity or social engagement at work, but also health and wellness. The technology to monitor heart rate and physical activity already exists, and it may not be long before it is widely used to determine health care benefits and costs. Companies already give incentives to non-smokers and offer gym memberships to employees.

“Wearable devices could let employers know when and how workers are using health-related perks. Do workers tend to use the gym at the same time? Will they give everyone time off to use it, based on that data? Will they send alerts if they notice workers are sedentary too long? Will that be welcome to employees? That’s hard to say,” said Challenger.

“Tracking workers is very unlikely to go away, especially as the technology becomes available and as more and more workplaces create virtual positions. The issue is how employers and workers use it,” he added.