

The Silent Drift

A Narrative of Quiet Quitting in Recovery

Experience, Strength & Hope · The Recovery Files

A powerful exploration of quiet quitting in recovery—the incremental disengagement from practices and supports.

COMMUNITY & MOMENTUM · ENGAGEMENT · INTERMEDIATE

I can pinpoint the exact moment my recovery began to unravel, though I didn't recognize it then. It was a Tuesday evening, around six months into my sobriety. I was sitting in my car outside the community center where my support group met weekly, scrolling through emails on my phone. The meeting would start in five minutes. I had attended faithfully for twenty-six consecutive weeks, rarely speaking but always present, absorbing others' experiences like a sponge.

That evening, an email from work demanded immediate attention—or so I told myself. "I'll skip just this once," I thought, starting my car instead of walking inside. "It's just one meeting. I'll go next week." I texted my sponsor a vague excuse about not feeling well, then drove home with a curious mixture of guilt and relief washing over me.

I did not, in fact, go the following week. A dinner with old friends seemed more pressing. The week after, I convinced myself I was too tired after a long workday. By the fourth missed meeting, I no longer bothered constructing elaborate justifications. The Tuesday evening slot in my calendar quietly disappeared, like a star fading from the night sky so gradually you don't notice its absence until it's completely gone.

This pattern—what my counselor would later call "quiet quitting"—extended beyond those Tuesday meetings. The morning meditation practice that had anchored my early recovery shortened from twenty minutes to ten, then five, then became an occasional thought about mindfulness while brushing my teeth. The recovery literature on my nightstand disappeared beneath magazines and novels. My check-ins with my sponsor, once daily, dwindled to weekly texts, then sporadic responses to her increasingly concerned messages.

The insidious nature of this disengagement lay in its incremental progression. Had someone asked if I was still committed to recovery, I would have answered with genuine indignation that of course I was. After all, I hadn't relapsed. I was simply "adjusting" my recovery to fit my increasingly busy life—or so the story went in my mind.

My sponsor noticed before I did, of course. "You're drifting," she said during a rare phone call I'd finally answered. I bristled at her observation, defensively listing all the ways I was still "in recovery" while conveniently omitting all the practices I'd abandoned. "I'm just finding my own path," I insisted. "The intensive program approach works for some people, but I'm stable enough now to customize my recovery."

Looking back, I can identify the constellation of factors that contributed to my quiet quitting. First came complacency, born from six months of successful sobriety. The acute cravings had subsided; the immediate chaos of early recovery had stabilized. This seeming success bred a dangerous overconfidence—a belief that I had somehow "graduated" from needing rigorous support.

Beneath this complacency lay a deeper, more complicated truth: recovery had begun unearthing painful emotions and memories that substances had long kept buried. As my therapist started exploring childhood trauma and relationship patterns, I found myself increasingly uncomfortable with the raw vulnerability this work required. The progressive disengagement from recovery activities conveniently protected me from this emotional excavation.

Social factors played their role as well. After months of isolation in early sobriety, I had cautiously reconnected with friends—many of whom still drank moderately. Their apparent ability to maintain healthy relationships with alcohol gradually eroded my conviction about abstinence. While I wasn't yet ready to drink again, being around casual drinking culture subtly reinforced questions that had lingered at the edges of my commitment.

These doubts created fertile ground for what recovery literature calls "cognitive dissonance"—the uncomfortable mental state that arises when beliefs and behaviors contradict each other. Rather than resolving this dissonance by recommitting to recovery practices, I began subtly altering my beliefs to match my diminishing engagement. "Recovery looks different for everyone," became my mantra.

Professional demands provided the perfect alibi for this growing disengagement. A promotion at work meant longer hours and increased responsibilities. Unlike addiction, which carries stigma, workaholism is often socially rewarded. My increasing focus on career provided both a socially acceptable explanation for missing recovery activities and a new source of validation.

The physical manifestations of quiet quitting emerged gradually. Sleep quality deteriorated first, though I attributed this to work stress rather than weakening recovery. Irritability increased, especially with family members who had previously commented on how much calmer I seemed in sobriety. Old thought patterns resurfaced—catastrophizing minor setbacks, personalizing random events, filtering out positive experiences while magnifying negative ones.

My relationship with honesty transformed subtly but significantly. In active addiction, dishonesty had been blatant—direct lies about how much I'd consumed, where I'd been, what had happened. In quiet quitting, the dishonesty became more sophisticated—lies of omission, strategic vagueness, technical truths that created misleading impressions. When my therapist asked about my support group attendance, I might respond, "I'm finding different ways to engage with recovery," without explicitly admitting I'd stopped attending entirely.

The narrative I constructed about this disengagement revealed my quiet quitting in plain sight, had I been willing to hear it. "I'm focusing on living a normal life rather than making recovery my entire identity." "I need to find balance rather than obsessing about sobriety." Each statement contained a grain of truth that made it believable, even admirable-sounding, while masking the reality that I was systematically dismantling the structure that supported my sobriety.

The most telling sign of quiet quitting emerged in my changing relationship with the recovery community itself. People I had connected with deeply in early sobriety gradually became sources of discomfort—their commitment highlighting my waning engagement, their questions about my absence triggering defensiveness. I began avoiding certain locations, routes, and social media groups that might bring me into contact with these reminders of full participation.

Nine months into recovery—and three months into my progressive disengagement—came the moment that finally forced my recognition of the path I was

on. I found myself standing in the wine aisle at the grocery store, studying labels with the focused attention of a sommelier. I wasn't actively planning to purchase alcohol; I had simply drifted into the aisle without conscious intention, drawn by a gravitational pull I hadn't acknowledged was strengthening.

That evening, I reluctantly reached out to my sponsor, expecting judgment for my extended absence. Instead, I found what recovery had consistently offered: understanding without endorsement, compassion without enabling. "This happens to almost everyone at some point," she said. "The question isn't whether you'll experience the pull to disengage, but whether you'll recognize and address it before it leads you all the way back to active addiction."

Re-engagement wasn't as simple as resuming old routines. Some relationships had cooled during my absence; some group dynamics had shifted. More significantly, my perspective had changed—I returned not as a newcomer riding the emotional wave of early recovery, but as someone who had experienced both the benefits of connection and the subtle danger of disconnection.

The most valuable insight from this experience was recognizing that quiet quitting isn't a one-time event but a recurring temptation throughout long-term recovery. The pull toward disengagement can emerge during periods of significant stress, when recovery activities feel like additional burdens rather than sources of support. It can arise during times of success and stability, when complacency whispers that such intensive support is no longer necessary. It can activate during deep therapeutic work, when the unconscious mind seeks escape from painful emotional processing.

Understanding these patterns has transformed how I approach my ongoing recovery. Rather than viewing engagement as an all-or-nothing phenomenon, I've developed a more nuanced awareness of my participation levels. I now recognize early warning signs—canceling commitments last minute, performing recovery activities mechanically without emotional presence, finding elaborate justifications for reducing involvement.

I've also learned to distinguish between intentional recovery adaptation and unconscious quiet quitting. As recovery progresses, some natural evolution of practices is appropriate and healthy. The support required in year three typically differs from what was needed in month three. The key difference lies in whether changes are made

consciously, with accountability and ongoing assessment of their impact, rather than through a series of unacknowledged slips and justifications.

Today, at just over two years sober, I maintain vigilant awareness of the quiet quitting pattern. When legitimate life circumstances temporarily prevent full participation in certain recovery activities, I proactively increase engagement in others to maintain overall connection. When I notice resistance to recovery practices arising, I bring this awareness to trusted supports rather than acting on the impulse to withdraw.

Perhaps most importantly, I've learned that quiet quitting in recovery reflects a universal human tendency rather than personal failure or weakness. The gravitational pull toward old patterns, the resistance to vulnerability, the desire to believe we are exceptions to established wisdom—these forces operate in everyone's recovery journey at different points.

The Tuesday evening meeting still gathers at the community center. Some faces have changed; some core members remain. I take my seat now with a deeper appreciation for what brings us together—not just the substances we've left behind, but the ongoing practice of choosing connection over isolation, consciousness over avoidance, engagement over quiet quitting. Each meeting is both a homecoming and a recommitment, a recognition that recovery isn't a destination reached once but a path walked daily, step by intentional step.

THE MATCHED SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Silent Drift: Quiet Quitting in Recovery

This self-assessment is designed to help individuals in recovery identify and understand patterns of incremental disengagement from recovery practices and support systems—often called "quiet quitting." The assessment explores both early warning signs and established patterns of drift that may occur without conscious recognition.

Instructions

For each statement, rate how often it applies to you using the scale:

- 1 - Never: This doesn't apply to you
- 2 - Rarely: This occasionally applies
- 3 - Sometimes: This sometimes applies
- 4 - Often: This frequently applies
- 5 - Always: This consistently applies

Part 1: Early Warning Signs of Drift

1. I find reasons to skip recovery meetings or activities I previously attended regularly
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
2. I've shortened or simplified recovery practices (meditation, journaling, readings) from their original form
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
3. I respond to recovery check-ins or messages later than I used to
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
4. I feel mild irritation or impatience during recovery activities I previously found meaningful
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
5. I find myself thinking I've "graduated" beyond needing certain recovery supports
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
6. I use being busy as a reason to reduce recovery engagement
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
7. I feel uncomfortable around people who are actively engaged in recovery
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
8. I use phrases like "finding my own path" or "customizing my recovery" to justify reduced involvement
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
9. I avoid certain places or people that remind me of my full recovery engagement
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
10. I find myself making last-minute decisions to skip recovery activities
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always

Part 2: Established Patterns of Quiet Quitting

11. I maintain a self-image of being "in recovery" while having significantly reduced my actual recovery activities
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
12. I use vague or ambiguous language when asked about my recovery engagement
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
13. I've stopped specific recovery practices without consciously deciding to do so
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
14. My communication with recovery supports has significantly decreased from earlier in recovery
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
15. I find myself thinking that my situation is different from others who need ongoing recovery support
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
16. I notice the return of thought patterns that were present during active addiction
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
17. I experience decreased quality of sleep, increased irritability, or other physical/emotional symptoms
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
18. I focus intensely on work, relationships, or other activities as substitutes for recovery engagement
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
19. I find myself near triggers or in risky situations without having planned to be there
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
20. I've constructed a narrative about my recovery that justifies decreased engagement
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always

Reflection Questions

Understanding Your Engagement Patterns

1. Which specific recovery practices or supports have you reduced or eliminated over time?

2. When did you first notice changes in your level of recovery engagement?

3. What justifications or explanations have you created for reduced recovery involvement?

4. How has your language about recovery changed over time?

Triggers for Disengagement

5. During what life circumstances do you find yourself most likely to reduce recovery engagement?

6. What emotions or internal experiences tend to precede your withdrawal from recovery activities?

7. How has success or stability in recovery influenced your commitment to ongoing practices?

8. What role has discomfort with vulnerability or emotional processing played in your engagement level?

Current Impact

9. What changes in thought patterns, emotional states, or behaviors have you noticed as engagement has shifted?

10. How has your relationship with the recovery community changed over time?

11. In what ways has your self-perception as "someone in recovery" remained consistent or changed?

12. How close have you come to relapse or high-risk situations during periods of decreased engagement?

Social and Environmental Factors

13. How has your social circle influenced your recovery engagement?

14. What role has work or other commitments played in your recovery participation?

15. How has your environment supported or undermined consistent recovery practices?

16. What boundaries between recovery and other life areas have weakened over time?

Re-engagement Strategies

17. What specific recovery practices would be most important to strengthen or resume?

18. What has helped you recognize and address drift patterns in the past?

19. What accountability structures could support more consistent engagement?

20. How might you distinguish between healthy evolution of recovery practices versus quiet quitting?

Your scores, and what they mean, are in the app.