

Quiet Works

*Changing the Conversation
About the Role of
Silence in the Workplace*

A Position Paper

by Joe McCormack

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"Quiet is not a technique.
It's an appointment."

— Joe McCormack

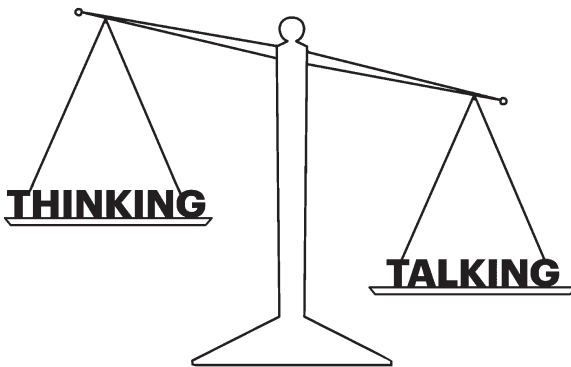
We need to reimagine the workplace.

When we go to work, we often think that talking is a sign of productivity. Imagine if someone was sitting at their desk reading. That wouldn't look like work, it would look like leisure. Imagine if somebody was sitting and thinking for an extended period of time. That would look more like daydreaming or even laziness.

Of course, it isn't true that these activities are unproductive or useless. We realize that they are in fact important yet we do not give ourselves or others permission to do them. Instead, we default to talk-to-talk and create non-stop noise.

It's time to change the conversation. Work is about thinking and doing. Work is about thinking and talking. We need to give ourselves a time and a place to think at work. And that means we need to introduce quiet into the workplace.

Quiet works – but we don't give it a chance.



Professionals need to dedicate more time to thinking before talking and doing.

Our beliefs and behaviors are flawed:

- ▶ People think that if you're sitting still and not doing something you're not working.
- ▶ People believe that collaboration is always useful and you can only get work done by having other people around.
- ▶ People think that everyone in the work environment should be an extrovert.
- ▶ People act as if staying connected to technology is essential at every moment of the day.
- ▶ People feel that they have the right for you to drop everything when they come calling.
- ▶ People are more comfortable being busy than being thoughtful.
- ▶ People believe you should always be accessible, no matter where you are.



“Quiet is the secret ingredient that restores clear thinking to the workplace.”

— Joe McCormack

A simple set of principles & practices.

- 1 ATTENTION IS A SCARCE RESOURCE THAT NEEDS TO BE PROTECTED.** Focus on one thing at a time and avoid the temptation to multitask. Protect your attention from distraction.
- 2 QUIET IS A POWERFUL INGREDIENT IN OUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES.** Just a few minutes can set the tone for the day. Let people know when you need it. Post "do not disturb" signs that let others know not to interrupt or distract you.
- 3 QUIET DESERVES A DEDICATED SPACE.** Being surrounded by screens and interruptions won't cut it. Designate a specific area at the office, home and on the road as your own quiet workplace.
- 4 QUIET DESERVES A SCHEDULED TIME.** Schedule specific moments for quiet time and treat them as non-negotiable appointments. Remember, it's less about your technique and more about consistently making quiet happen.
- 5 TECHNOLOGY ISN'T ALWAYS NECESSARY.** Take tech "timeouts" during the day, especially at the start and end.
- 6 COLLABORATION ISN'T ALWAYS BENEFICIAL.** Have portions of the day reserved for deep work. Don't interrupt people during these times. In meetings, provide silent starts so everyone is in the right mindset before they begin talking.
- 7 EVERYTHING ISN'T AN EMERGENCY.** Say "no, not now" more often by having concrete criteria of what is actually urgent and important.

How we got here: too much talking.

In the past, we were promised open floor collaboration. We took down the boundaries between us and removed offices with doors completely. This was an invitation to collaborate. Unfortunately, it was also what killed people's ability to actually get work done in quiet.

When people started working from home, they discovered that there is a dimension of silence in the day that was not there at the office. Now, as we look toward a hybrid work environment, we need to redefine the workplace and set the boundaries between talking and thinking. We need to re-introduce quiet.

Because our workplace is noisy – no matter where we work. It's filled with constant distractions, always and everywhere connected to technology, prone to endless disruptions and designed for constant collaboration now, and concentration later – or never.

Make quiet part of the conversation.

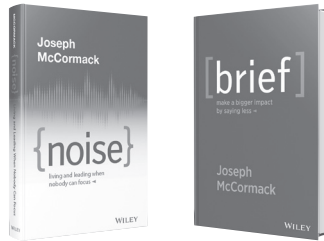
It's time to change the conversation about the role of silence in the workplace. At the Quiet Workplace, we recognize you need a simple set of beliefs and behaviors that guide you toward moments of consistent quiet and set the tone for more intentional, fulfilling work.

Let's make silence part of the conversation we have about what's fulfilling, meaningful work. Don't give in to noise, and don't give up.

Give quiet a chance. Quiet works!

"If you don't manage the noise,
it will manage you."

— Joe McCormack



About The Quiet Workplace

We are changing the conversation about the role of quiet in the workplace, whether that's in the office, at home or on the go. The Quiet Workplace provides people with simple principles, practices, programs, and compelling ways to reimagine when and where they work.

The Quiet Workplace is a subsidiary of the Sheffield Company LLC, founded by Joe McCormack in 2006. He is the author of two books: *BRIEF: Make a bigger impact by saying less* (Wiley & Sons, 2014) and *NOISE: Living and leading when nobody can focus* (Wiley & Sons, 2019). He is also the founder of The BRIEF Lab and publishes a weekly podcast called "Just Saying" that tackles topics related to clear thinking and concise communication.

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