

The Quiet Workplace

An Essay

by Joe McCormack

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Every morning, I dread my morning commute. It's not the traffic or time wasted, as much as what awaits me once I finally get there.

It's not the people, really. They're nice, welcoming and usually helpful.

You see, there's so much careless movement, undirected action, useless words and pointless posturing. My mind immediately and constantly races to find something to latch onto to gauge where I'm supposed to be going, only to see myself and others chasing our tails more frequently than heading forward. My brain starts feeling the incessant abuse of a barrage of "noise" that I can never get to clarify or direct, but only get more distracted and divided.

The environment is far from quiet.

I don't mean one of pure silence like a library, but one filled with energy, purpose – and pauses. If it were equated to a journey, there would be as much time set aside for planning, rest and recovery not just always trudging along. Because that is what we do. When there's a cacophony of activity, we trudge along and equate that with moving forward. When it's not quiet, we never stop to look back at the wasted efforts invested in

our twists and turns, and rarely look far enough forward to set our sights on what's better, different or next.

When the environment is not quiet, we don't ask questions. We just keep on talking and walking. And that takes a toll on me.

I feel frustrated more than fulfilled and it's tiring. I may want to leave where I work but I'm stuck. Where would I go anyway? Home or to a park? Take a long walk? Maybe, but what if my workplace gave me a different space.

A place to think a little or a lot...not somewhere that's basically thoughtless.

A place where I could feel a sense of balance, connection and purpose...not corporate callousness.

A place where I could often do what's challenging and meaningful...not frequently what's useless.

That would sound great to me. That would sound less like the droning of a loud machine. That would really sound more like a rhythmic, melodic hum. Much more human, way more humane.

That would be the quiet workplace and I would love heading there every day!

Joe McCormack is the author of *Noise: Living and Leading When Nobody Can Focus* (Wiley & Sons, 2019). He started the Sheffield Company in 2006 to help professionals become more effective and efficient communicators. His first book, *Brief: Make a Bigger Impact by Saying Less* (Wiley & Sons, 2014) sets the standard for clear and concise communication.

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