

10 SIGNS OF A LONELY WORKFORCE CHECKLIST



MEET THE LONELIEST WORKERS

During the many years the 19th and 21st U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, cared for patients, he said, “The most common pathology I saw was not heart disease or diabetes; it was loneliness.” If the most common ailment among people is loneliness, then assume loneliness lingers among your team. The question isn’t if your team is lonely but how many team members are.

Before providing the ten signs of a lonely workforce, here’s an overview of the loneliest workers. While the following will provide a more granular understanding of the workers most susceptible to loneliness, do not lose sight that loneliness is a universal condition and is impacting your team whether you see your team represented in the below data or not.

The loneliest workers are...

- Single
- Childless
- Non-religious
- Well-educated *
- Non-heterosexual
- Remote workers **

* People who held a graduate degree reported higher levels of loneliness and less workplace support than those who had only completed undergraduate or high school degrees. In addition, people with law and medical degrees were lonelier than those with a bachelor’s degree or PhD.

** Lonely workers are more likely to be remote workers. And loneliness is the biggest struggle to working remotely. When taking advantage of hybrid work policies, remote workers often feel indebted to their employer which can lead to working longer hours and neglecting to tend to their personal and professional relationships.

The loneliest workers work in...

- Legal
- Engineering
- Science
- Government

Occupations with high rates of social interaction, such as social work, marketing, and sales, have the least lonely workers.

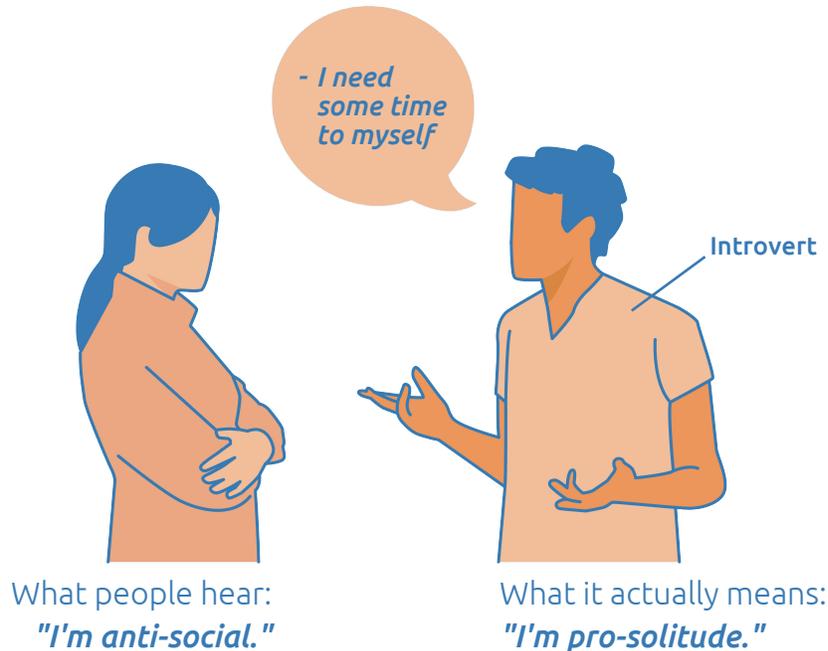
The following factors had no impact on worker loneliness...

- Geographic location
- Gender
- Race
- Staying in the same job (*tenure*)
- Ethnicity
- Salary *

* *Salary only slightly impacted feelings of loneliness. Workers making \$80,000 a year only showed about a 10% improvement in loneliness over their counterparts making half that much.*

Don't be fooled by extroversion. According to University of Canterbury's Senior Lecturer Sarah Louise Wright's research on loneliness in the workplace, "a potential difficulty with connecting social skill directly with loneliness is that in certain environments, such as the workplace, social skill may not always act as a buffer against loneliness. For example, interpersonal competence (with leaders, peers, or clients/customers) could account for an individual's rise up an organization's hierarchy, but the individual may still experience loneliness because of professional distance from peers and subordinates, or being marginalized because of status."

What people hear an introvert say versus reality



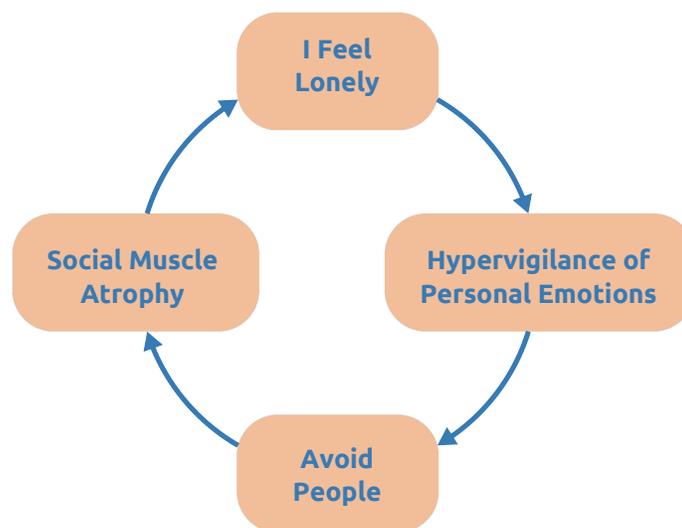
Similarly, for some people, success in the workplace may be more prized than closeness to colleagues. Therefore, an individual may discount workplace relationships if achievement at work fulfills their primary goals. Taking closer looks to uncover team members' motivations is important.

It's also important to understand that lonely people don't have lower innate social skills, but rather, their preoccupation with their own feelings of loneliness leads to impaired empathy for others and makes them less approachable.

Non-lonely workers report higher job satisfaction, more promotions, less frequent job switching, and a lower likelihood of quitting their current job in the next six months. Identifying lonely workers and then moving them from disconnected to connected is beneficial for the individual, team, and business.

How to Spot Lonely Workers

Loneliness is defined by the absence of connection, not necessarily people. Workplace loneliness is defined by the distress caused by the perceived inadequacy of a quality connection to teammates, leaders, and the organization itself.



Cycle of Loneliness

Within organizations, leaders and close colleagues are best positioned to spot workers struggling with loneliness. However, loneliness can be difficult to identify because it's a subjective experience. There are no hard and fast rules about what it looks like.

Many people may also hide their feelings for fear of embarrassment, or because they don't want to appear weak. This can make loneliness difficult to identify. As a manager or concerned coworker, your best approach is to take the time to get to know and really understand the people on your team. This will help you to recognize when someone is feeling disconnected or left out by the rest of the team. Be sure to listen to other team members' concerns too; they might be more aware of their colleague's feelings and emotions than you are.

10 SIGNS OF LONELY WORKERS

Here are common identifiers of lonely workers. As an exercise, think of someone on your team you suspect might be feeling lonely. Which of the following applies to them?

Sloppy Work

Careless behaviors, a decrease in work quality, or irresponsibility from a usually dependable worker is an indicator of potential loneliness. Sloppy work is a key indicator that someone is working with a lessened sense of connection to either the team or their work.

Examples:



- *Missing project deadlines*
- *Makes uncharacteristic mistakes*
- *Takes short cuts with clients or customers*
- *Delivers incomplete assignments*

Lack of Learning and Development

Curiosity and a growth mindset are good indicators of employee engagement. When employees are leaning into learning, they show a level of optimism about their future. When they don't, it could be because they are disengaged or disconnected.

Examples:



- *Limited participation in training*
- *Disdain for extracurricular activities*
- *Doesn't ask questions*
- *Uninterested in their career progression*

Break in Routine

Engaged employees are reliable, with recognizable routines. Reliable employees whose routines change might be an indicator of a growing sense of isolation.

Examples:



- *Showing up to work late*
- *Taking extra-long lunches*
- *Leaving or logging out early*
- *Working late nights or weekends*

Stops Offering Input

Feelings of insecurity are associated with loneliness. When workers stop offering suggestions or participating in goal setting, it could be because they do not want to be seen.

Examples:



- *Lack of eye contact during meetings*
- *Not speaking during meetings*
- *Doesn't ask for feedback*
- *Avoids planning or strategy sessions*

Skips or Resents Meetings

Lonely people avoid others. No showing or arriving routinely late to meetings indicates a disconnected worker. Lonely people can also be hostile to those around them.

Examples:



- *Not apologizing for being late*
- *Keeping camera off during video meetings*
- *Being disgruntled during meetings*
- *Quick to anger while among others*

Only Talks Work

Lonely workers are often unwilling to talk about non-work-related items. Only talking about work is a signal that someone isn't interested in developing connections.

Examples:



- *Does not talk about hobbies*
- *Shies away from discussing personal topics*
- *Wary to engage in small talk*
- *Deflects any non-work-related questions*

Limited Interaction with Co-Workers

Absent on communication platforms, long delay between communications, or avoiding small work gatherings are indicators that a worker might feel isolated.

Examples:



- *Eats lunch at desk*
- *Avoids joining special interest work groups*
- *Lack of curiosity in others*
- *Short responses during conversations*

An Apathetic Attitude

An unwillingness to present or defend their ideas, fulfill commitments, or be accountable can be a sign of loneliness. Lonely people often demonstrate more negativity.

Examples:



- *Passive approach to work*
- *Low energy levels*
- *Somber demeanor*
- *Disinterested in serving customers*

Unkempt Appearance

Disorderly workspace or appearance can be an indication of an indifference to establish connections with fellow workers.

Examples:



- *Disheveled clothes*
- *Ungroomed appearance*
- *Messy desk or cluttered workspace*
- *Recurring outfits*

Excessive Working

Spending too much time working as a way to avoid personal responsibilities can point to an imbalance in social relationships. Taking on too much work can be leveraged as an excuse to avoid professional and personal social interactions.

Examples:



- *Piling up vacation days*
- *Volunteering for too many projects*
- *Returning emails late at night*
- *Hurrying from meeting to meeting*

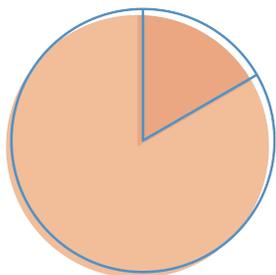
CONCLUSION

When passengers (your team members) are on your bus (your team at work), their well-being becomes your business. While you cannot control what they do outside of the bus, you can control how seen, safe, and engaged they are on your bus. As your team leaves the bus for the evening, weekend, or for greener pastures, how you made them feel while they were on the bus has the potential to impact their off-work behaviors and ripple across the entire community.

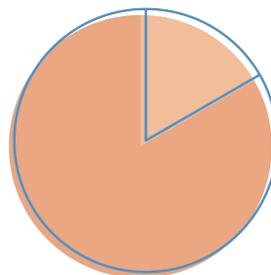
We're not asking you to be a therapist or psychologist. You aren't asked to diagnose mental health conditions or heal emotional scars. But rather, look for signs of loneliness and look for opportunities to create more connection across your team. We're asking you to slow down. Put the bus in park. Get out of your seat. And look... really see your team.

Take it from a professional looker, Ansel Adams, who is widely considered one of the most influential landscape photographers of the 20th century, "A photograph is usually looked at, seldom looked into." Go beyond looking at and look into your team.

How to create more belonging at work



Look **At** Your Team



Look **Into** Your Team

SENSE OF BELONGING

Identifying lonely and disconnected individuals on your team is the critical first step. You do not need to fully understand loneliness like a doctor understands the human genome, but you can understand in the same way a fitness coach assesses individuals. You need to appreciate the health benefits of a strong body and mind, identify unhealthy behaviors in others, and demonstrate the right activities to promote a healthy lifestyle. You don't need to cure someone's ailments (like a doctor), but you can be proactive about easing their condition (like a fitness coach).

Want to quantify how disconnected your team is and get a custom plan to improve it?



The Team Connection Assessment™

The 10 Signs of Lonely Workers will help you identify individuals on your team who might be suffering from loneliness. The Team Connection Assessment™ allows you to quantify how connected your team is. It's the first (and only) tool to effectively measure the strength of relationships among a team. It measures the strength and quality of connections teams have with their teammates, manager, and the work itself.

It's easy to administer and only takes fifteen minutes to complete. After completing the assessment, you will be provided with a team score based on the 4 Levels of Team Connection™ and a custom report providing research-based recommendations to improve the team connection score. Our devices are always informing us how strongly they are connected to wifi or other networks. It's time workers and leaders have the same connectivity information about their teams.

Take the assessment or share it with your team.

[Access the Assessment](#)

Want a fun and engaging tool to reconnect the individuals on your team whether in-person or remote?

Connect Deck™

30 simple research-based daily activities to connect team members with humanity and their team (in-person or remote). Grab a deck for yourself or your whole team.

[Buy a Deck](#)



Want a practical tool to further equip you to move your team from isolated to all in?

Connectable: How Leaders Can Move Teams From Isolated to All In

The world's first book to address workplace loneliness. The book brims with stories, stats, and strategies that inspire and equip leaders at any level.

[Buy the Book](#)

