

# ST.GALLEN SYMPOSIUM

## Global Essay Competition 2024

**Title:** Scarcity of Commitment: Navigating the Societal Impact of Eroding Connections in the Modern Age

**Essay:**

Engulfed in the wide spectrum of expectations and ambitions, we often fail to embellish the true essence of life and learning. We strive for as much as our potential permits, but our potential is ever multiplying. So, we jump from one boat to another, never reaching the shore. Somewhere in the race to discover the next big thing and be the next big billionaire, we severed our connection with reality. We are constantly in a rush to outperform, outrun and outdo under the pretext of progress. But a key ingredient that progress takes is running scarce: Commitment.

While the world deliberates about dwindling reserves of oil, water, and precious minerals, another, quieter crisis is simmering beneath the surface: a decline in commitment. This shift permeates our lives, from fleeting relationships and "ghosting" in dating to disposable careers and "quiet quitting" at work. Even our planet suffers from this dwindling dedication, as environmental issues languish without sustained commitment to sustainability. This erosion of commitment, whether to individuals, chosen paths, or the planet itself, poses a challenge as significant as the resource depletion that steals headlines.

First, let us focus on the professional landscape. Job hopping, which was once a taboo, has now become the norm. More than 22% of workers around the age of 20 spent less than one year with a company [2]. This trend is more common among Gen Z and Millennials, who show an inclination towards autonomy and creativity over steady growth. Another recent trend is that of "Quiet Quitting." Quiet Quitters have been defined by Anthony C. Klotz in HBR as those employees who "continue to perform all their regular work, but they refuse to go above and beyond and engage in what researchers refer to as citizenship behaviors" [8]. This trend might seem innocuous at first, but it has deep underlying implications for the quality of work and the work environment. These employees introduce an air of nonchalance in the office, undermining the proactive efforts of their colleagues. Companies work with the expectation that fresh talent would add an element of creativity, but upon interaction with the quiet quitters, they might feel demotivated or skeptical of the management at large. This phenomenon stems from a lack of loyalty towards the company and a lack of commitment to the company goals. This could be a reason for why freelancing and the gig economy are on the rise, where people take up low commitment contract tasks with companies or independent clients. Out of the companies surveyed by Upwork, almost 66% are in favor of increasing their freelance workers in the next year [5, 6]. Youngsters are less willing to take up long-term roles; instead, they prefer flexibility. However, the entire blame does not rest upon the employees. Companies themselves contribute to this ecosystem. Cost-cutting measures lead to frequent layoffs, eroding employee loyalty and fostering a transactional relationship. Major tech firms like Google, Microsoft, and Salesforce have been on the tracker recently for laying off a significant number of workers in a very short span of time [4]. Among Indian companies, we have Meesho, Dunzo, and Cred joining the layoff game [9]. There seems to be a lack of trust and mutual understanding between the two parties; employees and employers are experiencing weaker bonds than ever before.

Second is the bedrock of human relations: marriages and dating. Marriage rates are falling while there has been a general upward trend in divorces across the world [11]. People are opting for "live-in" or marriages. Additionally, people are marrying much later in their lives. Although there can be various reasons for this shift, ranging from personal to social situations, but the root cause is unmistakably the theme of this essay. Commitment issues are the major cause of failing marriages. People are also more likely to go for a casual relationship over a serious one [3]. Apps like Tinder, Bumble, and Hinge have encouraged people to connect with a large pool of prospective companions quicker but not necessarily deeper; they foster a culture of instant gratification and casual connections. There is a constant need to keep your options open and continue searching for the perfect one, abnegating the

fact that it takes commitment to forge the perfect relationship. People need to understand that while technology offers options, it can also contribute to a "disposable dating" mentality, making commitment seem undesirable or inconvenient. This trend further affects the rate of childbirth in countries. In the last 70 years, fertility rates have declined by 50% in the world [15]. This shift is irrevocably owing to women empowerment and better family planning in developing countries, but even developed countries are seeing this shift; hence, it can be safe to assume that there is certainly something larger at play, a fundamental shift in perspectives. This trend not only impacts population dynamics but also reflects a conscious decision to prioritize individual freedom and postpone or avoid the long-term commitment of parenthood.

Furthermore, homeownership, traditionally signifying stability and long-term planning, is declining. More people choose to rent, citing financial and personal reasons. However, money is clearly not the only concern, as three million US households making over \$100,000 are renting [12]. While this reflects economic realities for some, it also speaks to a societal tendency to avoid commitments, even when it comes to necessities.

Lastly, the clear inability of countries to commit to a sustainability agenda even when the world is in a state of imminent threat from global warming is a glaring reality check, affirming that we are indeed in a grave sociological and psychological problem that is to do with the scarcity of commitment.

The implications of lowering commitment are far-reaching. It impacts the very fabric of our societies, which is built on trust, stability, and shared values. When bonds within families, workplaces, and communities weaken, it results in a fragmented mess that does not focus on collective well-being; instead, it leads to isolation and social anxiety. Commitment is needed to cultivate genuine connections, without which we cannot function as a society.

It is a challenge that implores us to rethink our view on commitment. Instead of seeing it as a restrictive force, we should recognize its potential as a source of strength and security. To forge a way forward, employees need to align their goals with that of their company while companies need to prioritize and support a healthy work-life balance. This can be achieved through more stringent screening processes wherein companies not only focus on the capabilities of the candidates but also their vocational interests.

Additionally, ensuring financial stability becomes crucial in reestablishing commitment as a cornerstone of society. Economic uncertainties often become the reason behind reluctance to make long-term commitments. Hence addressing these concerns can help foster a sense of security that encourages individuals to invest in enduring relationships and work. One way to achieve this is by promoting financial literacy and access to resources that help individuals build a secure future, reducing the need for constant movement, like mandatory investing courses in colleges.

Moreover, emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in building resilient relationships and communities. Encouraging empathy, effective communication, and conflict resolution skills can strengthen bonds between individuals. Extensive self-reflection is needed to reach a level where we can acknowledge what we value as individuals and what we are looking for, whether we should seek it from outside or from within. Families need to have these discussions with their children right from the beginning; this will help them stay anchored to reality instead of chasing a far-away dream presented to them through social media.

Therefore, action needs to be taken on 3 levels:

1. On a personal level – Introspection, aligning your goals to that of your company, conversations within families and anchoring yourself to reality and realizable dreams.

2. On a company level – Hiring talent not just for talents but for their whole persona, having a long-term vision for this collaboration, employees are not just the means to an end.
3. On an academic level – Schools and colleges need to prepare students to be ready to face real-world challenges like financial fluctuations through more practical subjects like taxation and investing.

Embarking on this complex journey demands a deliberate intention to understand the loss, both personal and societal, linked with transient connections. By attributing significance to the strength of commitment, society can actively strive to shape a future characterized by stability and a profound sense of fulfillment. This endeavor requires acknowledging the intricate web that connects individuals with each other and recognizing their combined influence on the overall well-being of the wider community. In essence, a society that wholeheartedly reinstates commitment as a guiding ethos gains enhanced resilience in facing the turbulence of change and lays the groundwork for enduring significance and connection.

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