

Job Transformation

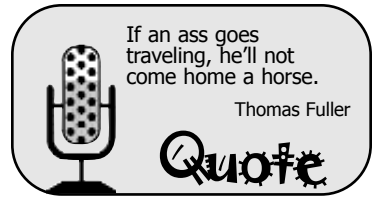
Enjoying Your Current Position

So you hate your job.

Maybe your supervisor is difficult – too mean, too vague, too controlling. Maybe the problem is the work itself. It bores you or doesn't suit your skills, making you feel incompetent. Maybe it's too stressful, with customers pressuring you all the time. Maybe you just feel fed up with your life and you can't stand it anymore.

You want to quit but you don't have another job lined up or savings to tide you over.

Congratulations. You've entered the "growth opportunity zone." As much as you dislike it, you still have to go to work every day. Sigmund Freud claimed that "[t]he postponement of gratification is the hallmark of maturity." Showing up for a job you dislike – postponing your dream job – helps you gain that maturity. This chapter describes how you can not only show up, but actually enjoy your job. All you have to do is change yourself: find a new you, not a new job.



Take Charge of Your Happiness

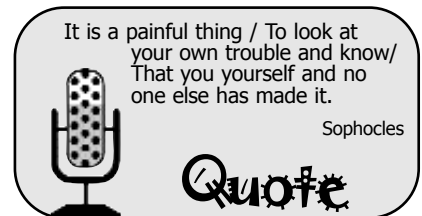
"Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be," Abraham Lincoln once said. He was right. Regardless of what you may may think, your job isn't making you miserable; you are.

Research confirms that we are responsible for our own happiness or unhappiness. According to human relations expert Andrew DuBryn, job

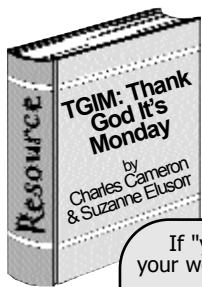
satisfaction depends more on internal factors, which you can control, than external factors, which you

cannot. The "Job Satisfaction Factors" box on the next page lists some of those factors.

"But I want to change my job, not myself," you may think. You may be wrong. A new job probably won't make you happy. New work changes the external factors, but if you don't alter your internal characteristics, you will still be miserable, as Gladys' story on the next page illustrates.

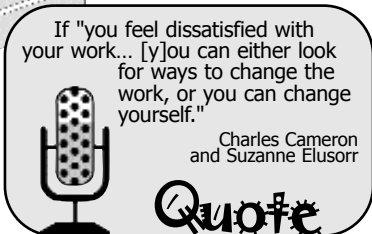


A new job isn't the answer if you are the problem. Sometimes the change that you need to make is inside yourself – especially if you have some of the "Traits that Cause Unhappiness" listed on the next page. Left unchecked, these personal qualities will turn even the greatest job into a pain for you.



If "you feel dissatisfied with your work... [y]ou can either look for ways to change the work, or you can change yourself."

Charles Cameron and Suzanne Elusor



When you look for a new job, be sure you are running *to* something (some opportunity), rather than running *away* from something else (yourself). Remember the adage, "wherever you go, there you are."

A Texan Story

Gladys, a technician at a pool cleaning company, was deathly afraid of her supervisor. He was a loud man and a little mean. She avoided him and finally quit just to get away.

At her new job, Gladys found herself working for someone who reminded her of her old boss. He upset her in the same way, heaping abuse on her when she made mistakes.

She decided that the pool industry attracted obnoxious

men. She thought that if she changed fields, even careers, she might find a kind supervisor.

She went back to school, got her nursing license and then a job at a local hospital. She soon realized, however, that her supervisor—a woman this time!—was as hard to deal with as her previous bosses.

Finally, it dawned on Gladys that she was the common denominator in all these relationships with supervisors.

She began to work on herself with all the effort she'd put into finding new jobs. She started standing up for herself when her supervisor treated her poorly. She also began to respect herself more.

By taking responsibility for her part of the problem, Gladys changed her relationship with her supervisor. She no longer played the victim.

In time, she found a new job with a very kind supervisor. Funny how that "happened."

Job Satisfaction Factors

Whether you like your job or not depends on many factors—some in the job itself (external) and some in you (internal).

External

- Mentally challenging work
- Reasonable physical demands
- Meaningful rewards
- Contact with customer
- Helpful coworkers and supervisors

Internal

- Interest in the work itself
- Work fitting your values
- Positive self-image
- Good personal adjustment
- Positive expectations about job
- A feeling of self-esteem reinforced by the job
- Optimism and flexibility

from *Job Savvy* by LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.

Traits That Cause Unhappiness

Certain attitudes, thoughts and behaviors can lead to unhappiness, making even the best job seem wretched. Do you see yourself in any of these descriptions? If so, you might consider making a change.

Thought Type	Description	Example	Consequence	Solution
Victim Mentality	Belief that other people or "life" are doing something to you; blaming	"My boss is an evil witch. She's always criticizing me. Why is this happening to me?"	Stagnant career; repeat same situation over and over: "all my coworkers have been snobby"	Take responsibility for your life and your role in creating each situation.
Low self-esteem	Negative self-talk, lack of self-confidence	"I stink at this job. I'll never get it right. I hope no one notices me."	Don't advance; don't perform to best of your ability; miserable	Increase your self-esteem by focusing your attention on helping others.
Fear (of failure, success, confrontation)	Avoidance, procrastination	"What if I can't do it? I've never done that before. Maybe I'll just deal with it tomorrow."	Paralysis, torment, shame, fear, forced to cram at the last minute	Explore your fears openly. Remember that courage comes after facing fear, not before.
Inflated self-esteem	Arrogance, refusal to ask for or give help, not listening to others	"I wish I could just do it all myself. No one knows more about this than I do."	Alienate others; unable to learn because of lack of humility; not viewed as a "team player"	See the value of others' ideas and skills. Ask for help and feedback.
Struggle Mentality	Belief that work is real-life version of TV show <i>Survivor</i> —full of paranoia, revenge, scheming, gossiping, forming alliances, sabotaging	"I better talk with Brad because Consuela's going to backstab me, I just know it."	Don't advance because no one trusts you; become victim when others retaliate against you	Recognize that you're alienating others. Focus on the common good of the organization. Understand that maintaining your own integrity is the most important thing.
Self-centered (taking things personally)	Belief that a performance review measures you as a person, that a customer's anger means you are bad, that anyone whispering must be discussing you	"They didn't implement my idea, so they must not like me."	Develop victim mentality; miserable, unable to grow because you see advice as an attack	Ask for feedback and desensitize yourself to it. Separate who you are from your work and ideas. Realize that you're not the center of everyone's world: it's not always about you.

adapted from *GenderTraps* by Judith Briles

Get a New Attitude

If you dislike your job, you might consider making a change—in yourself. If you transform the way you view and do your work, you might find yourself actually loving it. Once you stop struggling against your job—treating it as the problem—you begin to grow as a person and a worker.

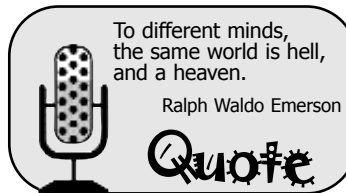
Some people seem to have everything in life yet they are miserable. Others live in desperate conditions, yet find joy. You have the power to choose how to respond to the world and to your job. Your attitude belongs to you alone. Here are some ways to transform it:

- **Identify your negative thoughts.** Negative thoughts cause negative feelings. What are you saying inside to make yourself miserable? You can begin to change your thoughts by recognizing that they may not be accurate.



- **Keep your sense of humor.** It's funny how we can make ourselves suffer needlessly. Laugh about it. When you can laugh at yourself, your attitude improves.

- **Look for other points of view.** Remember that your perspective is not necessarily "truth." Other people might think your work situation is great, though you don't. How could you view your situation differently?



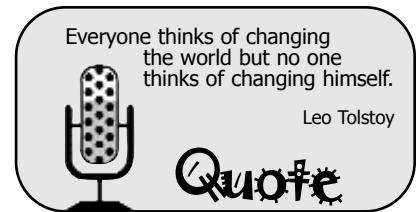
- **Be willing to be wrong.** "Would you rather be right or happy?" is a good question. Proving yourself "right" all the time wastes energy and pushes people away. And you're "wrong," anyway, if you damage relationships and lose opportunities because you want to win some minor point.
- **Have an "attitude of gratitude."** It's hard to be negative when you're grateful. The box below suggests some reasons to appreciate your job.

Attitude of Gratitude

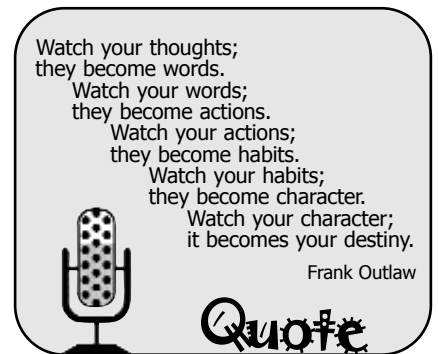
When you dislike your job, you probably don't feel grateful for it. But gratitude is the best antidote to negativity. Cultivate an "attitude of gratitude" and you find that your whole outlook changes.

What can you possibly feel grateful for about your loathsome job? Plenty. Even the most mundane work offers rich blessings. It enables you to:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain experience. Employers like to hire workers with a positive employment history. • Increase your skills and knowledge. It makes you more competitive during your next job search. • Earn income while you job hunt. Get paid to look for a position that advances your long-term career goals. • Pay for your education. It covers your tuition and other expenses as you make yourself more marketable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop relationships. Your coworkers and other customers may lead you to jobs in the future. • Explore the world of work. See first hand which occupations you really want to pursue. • Improve your character. You grow as a person when you work hard regardless of how you feel about it.
--	--



- **Let go of the drama.** Misery and negativity can be dramatic, while cheerfulness may seem dull. In reality, a bad attitude does not make you interesting; negativity requires little imagination. If you let it go, you risk becoming just another regular human being. It takes courage, but you might actually like it.



- **"Act yourself into right thinking."** Changing your behavior is the most effective way to change your attitude. (You may have already noticed that "thinking yourself into right acting" rarely works.) Eventually, acting cheerfully and thinking optimistically become habits and your positive outlook requires little effort to maintain.

Focus on Your Home Life

To enjoy your job more, improve your life outside work. If you try to get your sense of fulfillment and purpose from a job you dislike, you will be one miserable person. When you try to get meaning from your home life instead, your job seems less important and you resent it less.

All around the world, people work long hours in manual labor jobs. They have absolutely no choice over their "careers," much less try to find "fulfillment" from them. Still, many of them appreciate and enjoy life.

They find happiness by focusing their energy on personal activities, devoting themselves to their families, friends, religions and so on. Work is not their life; it just supports their life. Many Americans lose sight of this view. The more you keep it in mind, the better you feel about your job and your life.

It isn't success if it costs you the companionship and chumminess and love of your children.

BC Forbes



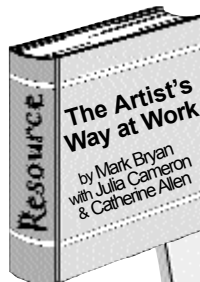
Quote

Pursue Personal Interests

You can de-emphasize your job's importance by viewing it as a mere means of supporting your hobbies and interests.

Greg, a tri-athlete, has a boring "day job" that doesn't require much energy. He appreciates it, though, because his wages pay for him to travel around the country and enter competitions.

Similarly, Faith uses her job as a stable hand to pursue her interest in horses. Mucking stalls is tedious work but she gets to board her horse for free in exchange. As a result, Faith feels very grateful for her work.



Build Relationships

Even if you do not have a compelling hobby or other interest, you can still decrease the importance of your job by focusing on the people in your life.

Spend more time with your children, your spouse, your parents, your friends. You never hear of people on their deathbeds saying that they wished they'd spent more time at work! Instead, they regret that they didn't spend more time with the people that they love. Don't be like them!

Helpful Hint

If you hate your job but can't make a living doing your hobby, *The Artist's Way at Work* authors suggest you think of your "day job" as just a way to pay for your heart's desire.

Give to Others

A wonderful way to improve the quality of your life outside of work is to help others. Unhappiness often stems from feelings of deprivation, a sense that you lack something (such as a "good job").

"I don't enough have time, money, love, fun, excitement, pleasure..." The list goes on. If you believe you don't ever have "enough," you actually create a life where that becomes (or seems) true.

You can break free of this rut by giving to others. When you give, especially when you think you have nothing to spare, you change the belief that you don't have "enough."

Whether it's time, money, attention or love, giving to others changes your life and even your attitude toward your job.

Reduce Your Stress

You can dramatically improve your life outside of work by learning to deal effectively with stress. Every human being in the world experiences stress. How you handle it determines whether you live calmly and fully or in a state of perpetual crisis.

Of course, ideally you would reduce stress by preventing it, says William Yeomans in *7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World*. You would structure your world so that everything went as smoothly as possible. Even your job would have low-stress and high-support so that it contributed to your serenity.

Most people don't have lives like that.

Most people have children and pets and partners and supervisors and there's no way to "structure smoothness" into all that. Most people have stress and lots of it!

If you're like most people, you can reduce the stress by:

- taking breaks
- stretching
- breathing deeply
- meditating
- practicing yoga
- singing
- actively pursuing your religion or spirituality
- getting regular massages
- exercising vigorously
- visualizing yourself in a serene location

Find out what works for you and do it!

Generous Acts

Unhappy with your life? In *One-minute Self-Esteem*, author Candace Semigran suggests anonymous acts of generosity to change your perspective:

- Leave change in pay phones or gum machines.
- Fill up someone else's parking meter.
- Drop money into a stranger's shopping bag.
- Send flowers to someone at work who doesn't get acknowledged much.
- Pay for a stranger's meal at a restaurant.
- Pay a bill for a friend who's struggling.
- Be especially kind to someone you dislike.
- Give to charity items that you don't need or love.
- Visit someone in a hospital or nursing home.

Transform How You Work


You can change your job without having to look for a new one. When you change how you function at work—especially in the areas of communication, relationships and goals—it’s like getting a new job. And it’s all within your power to do.

Communicate More Assertively

You can change your job dramatically by changing the way you communicate with others. Most communication falls into three styles: aggressive, assertive and passive (see the table below). Being assertive is by far the most effective.

Being assertive means providing information and asking for what you need in a way that respects the rights of others. To communicate more assertively:

- **Use “I” statements.**
Speak for yourself only. Say “I’ve done this” rather than “You should do that..” Or “My experience has been...” instead of “Everyone knows...”
- **Ask for what you want.**
Don’t expect other people to read your mind.
- **Be specific.**
Saying “I wish you’d be nicer to me” isn’t sufficient. Instead, say, “I wish you’d greet me when I say ‘hello’ in the hall.” Now the other person knows what to do.
- **Be honest.**
Stick to the facts; no excuses or stories.
- **Avoid labels.**
Say “I didn’t like it when...” rather than “You are so rude!” When you don’t label people, their behavior or their motives, they act less defensive and more open to changing.
- **Respect others. Period.**
Value their input and their worth as human beings.
- **Be polite.**
No shouting, name calling, personal remarks or insults.
- **Listen actively.**
Really try to understand what the other person says; don’t assume you know.



If we find nothing of interest where we are, we are likely to find little of lasting interest where we wish to go.

Edwin Way Teale

Quote

- **Keep it professional.**
Always remember that the work is more important than petty squabbles.
- **Stand up for yourself.**
Don’t tolerate bad behavior from others.
- **Be responsible for your feelings.**
All behavior is neutral: what irritates you may delight someone else. Be responsible for your reactions. Say “I feel annoyed...” rather than “You’re annoying.” That subtle difference keeps others from becoming defensive.
- **Be direct.**
Speak to the person you have issues with; don’t complain about her to others.
- **Accept defeat gracefully.**
Even if you don’t get what you want, at least you asked for it. If it is important, you can decide how—and whether—to proceed.

Different Communication Styles		
Aggressive	Assertive	Passive
Express your opinions, ideas, feelings	Express your opinions, ideas, feelings	Don’t express your opinions, ideas, feelings
Demand what you want	Ask for what you want	Accept what you’re given without question
Speak for others	Speak only for yourself	Let others speak for you
Speak openly, directly and overpoweringly	Speak openly, directly and honestly	Speak rarely, quietly and/or apologetically
Angry, intimidating body language	Relaxed, open body language	Withdrawn, closed body language
Don’t listen to anyone	Listen respectfully to others	Listen respectfully to others but not to self
Often get what you want, but at the expense of others	May or may not get what you want; always feel good about being true to yourself	Rarely get what you want; expect others to read your mind
Others fear and dislike you; they don’t respect or trust you	Others usually like you; they always respect and trust you	Others don’t know you well enough to truly like or trust you
Picking out a video example: “We’re getting <i>Die Hard</i> .”	Picking out a video example: “I’d like to see <i>Gladiator</i> . What do you want to see?”	Picking out a video example: “Whatever you want.”

adapted from *The Promotable Woman* by Norma Carr Ruffin

Improve Relations with Coworkers

One of the best ways to transform your job is to improve your relationships with those around you, say the authors of *Working and Liking It*.

Like many people, you may spend more time with your coworkers than with friends or even family. When your work relationships are positive and enjoyable, your job becomes more bearable and even fun.

You may need to regain some ground with coworkers if you've been unhappy at your job for a long time. If you've regularly complained about your work, your supervisor, the company or other coworkers, people at work might be sick of you. You can turn that around, however, if you:

- **Stop complaining.** When you stop venting negativity, people likely will want to be around you more. They will also be friendlier to you.
- **Apologize if necessary.** Whining about how pointless and degrading your job is to someone who has the same job, for example, is insulting. Take responsibility for yourself and acknowledge that your attitude—not the job—is the problem.
- **Socialize with your coworkers.** If you don't already, go out to lunch with them or eat with a group in the breakroom. Get together after (or before) work. Spending time together fosters positive relations.
- **Work hard and smart.** Establish or re-establish a reputation for producing results. The bottom line is simple: people like you more and treat you better when they can count on you to contribute to the group effort.

There are definitely times you don't love your job so you need to be committed to the big picture to keep going.



Laurie Dorsett, owner
The Blind Lady, Austin

Quote

from a *Person*

Focus on Your Career

Another way to transform your job is to make it align more with your own career and life goals. How does your current job fit into the big picture? Are you developing skills and connections that will benefit you later?

You will enjoy your job more if you have goals to work towards and a record of how you're reaching them.

Design long term goals

Begin thinking about your life goals by reading books, viewing software and taking one of the many interest/ability tests available at your local community college or workforce center.

Write down what you want to be doing five, ten, even twenty years down the line. Where do you want to be professionally, financially, emotionally, spiritually, physically and socially?

You may not reach all these goals. You may change them down the road. But without something to strive for, you're just drifting and that's no way to live—unless drifting is your goal!

Log achievements

The authors of *Working and Liking It* suggest you log your achievements. Write down the training you receive, the skills you develop, positive remarks from customers and your accomplishments.

Instead of thinking about where you are, think about where you want to be. It takes twenty years of hard work to become an overnight success.



Diana Rankin

Quote

When you list your achievements, your job shifts from "nowheresville" to an important way station on the way to your greater goals. In addition, the log shows your progress toward reaching your goals, which helps you stay motivated.

What to Change

If you could change anything about your work, what would it be? Which areas would be different and how? Use the list below to help you plan how you might transform your job.

Basic Conditions

- ambiance
- size of company
- comfort
- safety
- location of worksite (distance from home, area of town)

Equipment/Tools

- amount and type of supplies
- types of tools and equipment

Physical Environment

- size of personal space (if any)
- furniture
- lighting
- location
- air quality
- physical environment

Work Schedule

- number of hours
- schedule of hours
- flexibility of time

Nature of Work

- type
- pace
- level of responsibility
- compatibility with personal values

Opportunities

- to increase responsibility level
- to use abilities and follow interests
- to do meaningful and challenging work
- to increase power in decision-making
- to grow professionally and technically

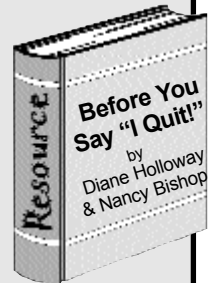
Rewards

- pay
- benefits
- recognition
- job security

Relationships


- reporting structure
- degree of input
- relations with supervisor
- relations with coworkers

adapted from *Before You Say "I Quit!"*
by Diane Holloway, Ph.D. and Nancy Bishops



Transform Your Job Officially

You can officially transform your job by gaining your supervisor's support. When you do, *what* you request and *how* you request it will determine your success.



Making a success of the job at hand is the best step toward the kind you want.
Bernard Mannes Baruch

Quote

What to Change

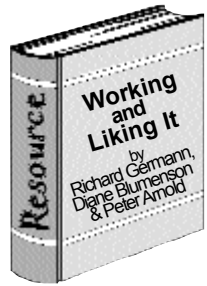
Before you approach your boss, select the area(s) you'd like to change in order to recapture your interest in your job. See the box on page 55 for ideas and also consider changing:

- **Job description**
If your talent and initiative (or necessity) have led you to take on extra duties, ask for recognition of those changes. By aligning your assigned duties with your actual responsibilities, your supervisor acknowledges your contribution and validates your work.
- **Job title**
Your boss may not have the power to do it, but you can request the change if your new duties merit a new title.
- **Wages**
Your supervisor may not have the authority to increase your wages but perhaps can offer a one-time bonus. Before asking, be sure your work deserves more money.
- **Hours**
If your work schedule contributes to your unhappiness with your job, ask for a change either in the hours you work or the flexibility you have to alter those hours.

How to Request a Change

Approaching your supervisor about transforming your job in any way requires some preparation and thought. Here is a simple yet effective process to follow:

1. **Exceed expectations already.**
Never ask your supervisor for an advancement or change of duties unless you already perform above and beyond what's required. You have to prove you can do the work before your job officially changes.
2. **Do your research beforehand.**
Ask people who do the types of duties that you perform what their titles and wages are. Learn the requirements for the "next level" as well. The Internet is an excellent resource for job statistics. Write a report of your findings.
3. **Schedule time to meet.**
Ask to meet your supervisor at a time that's convenient for him or her. Don't just send an email requesting a promotion.
4. **Be business-like.**
At the meeting, sit down, explain what you would like, show the research you've done and explain your reasoning.
5. **Be tactful.**
Your boss has the same insecurities as anyone. Make it clear – subtly – that you aren't trying to take his or her job. Your supervisor will be more likely help you achieve your goals if he or she isn't worried.
6. **Stress the benefits to the employer.**
Speak in terms of increased productivity, decreased duplication of effort, faster results and improved quality of work, as the box at the bottom of the page describes. It's much more effective than "I'm bored. I want to change my job" or "My rent's gone up so I need a raise."
7. **Negotiate.**
If your supervisor says "no," ask what you would need to do in order to advance or transform your job in the way you want.



Benefits of Transforming Jobs

When you approach your supervisor about transforming your job, be positive. Stress how the change will benefit your supervisor and the company.

Your Supervisor Gets:

- More time to work on the big issues.
- Less time on routine tasks.
- Fewer interruptions.
- Customers satisfied more quickly.
- Improved work product.

The Company Gets:

- Streamlined decision making.
- Fewer costs.
- Faster customer service.
- Greater customer satisfaction.
- Higher-skilled employees.
- More satisfied employees.

adapted from *Working and Liking It* by Richard Germann, Diane Blumenson and Peter Arnold

A Texan Story

Eric, a lab technician in Houston, wanted to be promoted to scientist. He asked his supervisor, Bridget, about making such a move.

He stressed how it would benefit her to promote him, explaining that he could assume some of the duties she disliked.

Bridget felt pleased to help him advance because he was such a valuable and productive employee. She didn't want to lose him to competitors.

She gave him a series of challenges—assignments that would demonstrate his competence, raise his visibility within the lab and ultimately justify his promotion.

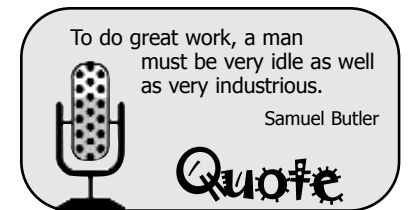
Eric completed all the tasks set before him and within a year he had a new title, new wages, a new workspace and a renewed enjoyment of his work.

Take Breaks

You can improve your life at work and at home by drawing sharper distinctions between the two. In other words, leave home at home and work at work.

It can be harder than it sounds. If you're like many people, the line between work and leisure is blurred. You skip lunch. You work at home or carry a cell phone; you're always "on-call." No wonder you're tired of your job. You need a break!

(Of course, if you're not one of those people, you can skip this page.)

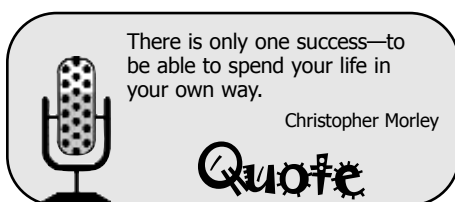


Take Breaks at Work

You are not a machine. You can't work non-stop at high intensity for eight hours straight. You need regular breaks to renew your energy.

Without breaks, your productivity declines. Since you're not a machine, you become resentful when you treat yourself like one. To take time off work:

- **Use your allotted time.**
Take breaks but always follow your supervisor's directions about the breaks' timing, duration and so on.
- **Stop what you are doing.**
For two minutes, do nothing but breathe slowly and evenly. Remind yourself that work is not your life; you are much more than your job.



- **Change the scenery.**
When you take a break, physically remove yourself from your normal work environment. Just a visit to a different part of the worksite helps.
- **Contact the outside world.**
If possible during your break, take a walk. Eat lunch at a restaurant. Call a non-work friend. Touching base with the rest of the world helps you put your job in perspective.

Leave Work at Work

When you go home after work, leave your job behind.

Ideally, your home life fills up the bucket of your emotional reserves. It re-energizes and renews you. If you regularly bring work home with you, however, your reserves dry up.

- **Don't take "homework" with you.**
Even if you decide not to do it, its presence in your house subtly tells you that you cannot "escape" your job. Stay late at work if you really have to finish something that night.
- **Don't worry about work.**
You can't do anything to improve the situation when you're at home, so why fret? It saps your energy and accomplishes nothing.
- **Use a ritual to leave work behind.**
This ritual serves as a way station between work and home and enables you to be emotionally available to the people and creatures at your house (including yourself).

The ritual can be something physical, such as stopping by the gym on your way home, meeting a friend after work or taking a short walk in the park—anything that serves as a buffer between work and home.

It can also be mental, such as a visualization that separates you mentally and emotionally from work. Athletes and performers use creative visualizations all the time to help them win. You can use it—like Michael in the story at right—to help you relax.

Take Time Off Work

You need a vacation sometimes. Everyone does. When you break out of your daily routine, you grow emotionally, mentally and spiritually. After several days away from work, you'll return to your job revitalized.

Here are some vacation suggestions:

- Leave town, even if just for a day.
- Do something fun—and completely unrelated to your work.
- Do nothing at all. Just be.
- Don't, Don't, DON'T work! No calls, cell phones, laptops or worries.

Most of all, enjoy yourself!

A Texan Story

Michael worked at the service desk of the city's electric company. All day long, he dealt with customers' complaints, excuses and problems. After eight hours of smiling and charming unhappy people, he often felt as though he'd been covered by a cloud of negativity.

To dissolve this negative energy, he used creative visualization on the bus ride home.

Michael would imagine that he was bathed in a shower of bright light that steadily washed away the black dust of negativity that surrounded him. He pictured the dust dropping through the floor of the bus and blowing out with the exhaust.

By the time he got home, he felt cleansed and renewed. His customers faded to a distant memory.

Make Time Fly By

Sometimes, despite your efforts to change your attitude about your job, it still comes down to just getting through the day or the shift. The following tricks, many suggested by the authors of *TGIM: Thank God It's Monday*, help make the time fly by when you're in one of those moods.

Make It a Game

Turning work into a game makes the work day fly. Your game's only objectives are to do your work and have fun. You can play many types of games alone or with coworkers. Be as creative as you like. Here are some ideas:

A Texan Story

Amanda handled customer returns at a large discount store. After a few miserable months on the job, she was ready to quit. Finally she asked her coworker Brandon what he did to keep the job interesting because he always seemed to be in a good mood. "I make it a game," he replied. So Amanda decided to play, too.

Soon the two of them were having private contests to choose the most obnoxious customer of the day. They kept track of the funny excuses people gave for returns, laughing about them later. They also raced to see how many exchanges each could make in an hour.

Their lighthearted approach not only made the day go faster, it also enabled them to serve the customers better. Their customers' irritability affected them less and their own good humor actually calmed the customers down.

- **Race yourself or others.**
See who can finish a task the fastest without losing any quality. How many customers can you serve in an hour? Can you beat your own record? Strive to be the fastest and best.
- **Pretend you're watching a movie.**
Mentally assign silly names to customers. Observe the strange and irrational things that people do. Treat it all as a comedy.
- **Pretend that you are an actor.**
You can try on different characters. One cashier at an Austin grocery store practices different accents as he greets people in the check-out line. His customers don't always get it, but he always has fun.

How to Stay Present

We often spend a lot of time thinking about what might happen or what just did happen. Thinking about the future and past keeps us from enjoying the present. Fortunately, staying in the present moment is a skill that anyone can learn. Just:

- 1. Pay full attention to the task at hand.**
Think about what you're doing. Focus all your senses on it. If you're touching an object, feel its texture on your fingertips. If you speak with someone, notice the color of their eyes, the texture of their clothes, their scent.
- 2. Focus on your breathing.**
Take slow, deep breaths, but don't exaggerate them. Some say that when we control our breathing, we control our lives.
- 3. Notice how you feel.**
Are you tense? Achy? Do you feel strong and relaxed? Just be in your skin.
- 4. Accept how you are.**
Don't try to force yourself to feel or think a certain way. If you're uncomfortable, explore the discomfort. If you are relaxed, be completely relaxed.
- 5. Re-focus when needed.**
When your mind wanders—and it will—gently return your attention to what you're doing.



Let us not look back in anger or forward in fear but around in awareness.

James Thurber

Quote

Make Someone's Day

Time passes quickly when you focus on others. If you try to spread good cheer, you cheer yourself most of all.

Go out of your way to help coworkers and other customers. Count how often your smile makes someone else grin. Spread some light in a world that can sometimes seem dark.

You may be amazed at how quickly time passes when you do.

You can be healed [of depression] if every day you begin the first thing in the morning to consider how you can bring a real joy to someone else.

Alfred Adler



Quote

Stay Present

It's hard to stay mentally present when you don't want to be where you are. If you hate your job, you need distractions, right?

Wrong. Staying present—focusing completely on the here-and-now—provides many benefits, such as:

- **Decreased clock-watching.**
You become so intent on stocking the cereal boxes, typing the memo or pounding the nail that you don't even notice the time.
- **Decreased negative thinking.**
When you focus on the present, you don't worry about the future or fret about the past. You free your mind of all negativity.
- **Increased vitality.**
When you concentrate on this very moment, your senses sharpen. You feel more alive.
- **Increased calmness.**
Staying in the present turns your work into a meditation, which benefits every area of your life. Any job is worthwhile if it helps you become a more serene person.

To practice staying present, follow the steps in the box at the left.

Learn about Yourself

Time passes quickly at work if you treat it as a chance to learn about yourself. Let your job be your teacher. See what makes you tick and how you can become more effective.

Pretend you're an anthropologist, studying yourself and your coworkers as you would a foreign culture. Like a social scientist, don't make judgments or try to change anything.

I have learned silence from the talkative; tolerance from the intolerant and kindness from the unkind. I should not be ungrateful to these teachers.

Kahlil Gibran

Quote

Instead, you observe, note and ask yourself questions. Why did you suddenly get restless? How does your coworker benefit from behaving so irresponsibly? Form theories to explain behavior (but keep them to yourself).

Your observations teach you how to be a good worker. And you learn from your own mistakes more easily because you are not critical of yourself.

A Texan Story

Laura, a college graduate, hated her administrative job at first. It required her to do a great deal of copying, which she thought was beneath her.

"I can't believe I spent five years in college just to make copies," she would think to herself.

Gradually, though, she began to embrace this mundane duty. Standing by the copier, listening to its hypnotic hum, she often found solutions to problems—both work-related and personal—that had preoccupied her.

Soon, Laura looked forward to copying. It was often her one time during the day or week to be still and listen within.

Use Your Boredom

If your job bores you or requires simple or repetitive tasks, you can make the time pass quickly and usefully by daydreaming. Many artists and thinkers do.

Creativity requires boredom. Without unstructured time to let your mind wander, creativity can't take hold.

Some people deliberately choose jobs that require little thought. The tedium fuels their creativity and gives them energy outside of work for their writing, music and so on. Others use the slow time at work to solve complex math or science problems. Like them, you can turn boredom into an asset.

A Texan Story

Annie is a writer. Her novel hasn't been published yet, so she works full time at her "day job." She doesn't feel discouraged by the hours she spends doing secretarial work, though.

She takes advantage of mindless tasks, such as putting labels on a thousand envelopes, to think about plot, character development and story structure. Her job actually stimulates her creativity and helps her writing.

See the Humor

The best way to make work pass quickly is to keep your sense of humor.

Humor helps on two levels. First, laughing is just a good release. It makes you feel good and, according to research, helps you live longer.

Humor also puts your life in perspective. In order to see the humor in a situation, you have to have some distance from it.

People have long known the value of laughter. You may think the old expression "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" means that Jack should take breaks from work.

It may also mean that Jack should play more at work. Laughing and joking, whether to yourself or with others, helps keep the clock-watching blues away.

I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying.

Woody Allen

Quote

Go with the Flow

One way to make time fly at work is to stop fighting your job and just go with the flow. Perhaps you like some aspects of your work but dislike others. When you stop resisting the tasks you dislike and start appreciating the parts you do, you find the hours just slip away.

Begin by embracing the fact that your work has variety. "Technical" jobs may require you to interact with people. A customer service job may require paperwork, too. The different types of work challenge different parts of your brain and personality.

You may always prefer some duties over others. Still, you can value the parts you dislike if only because they help you appreciate the parts you do like so much more.

Make Plans to Change Jobs

Ultimately, changing your attitude can only go so far. If your job does not match your talents, goals or values, you need a new one. Actively hunting for another position makes your current job more bearable. You see the light at the end of the tunnel and feel less trapped.

Leaving a job is not a sign of failure. According to Linda Bates Parker, President of Black Career Women, you should change your work position every three to five years to keep growing professionally. Leaving a job doesn't always mean leaving your employer, either. You may have many options.

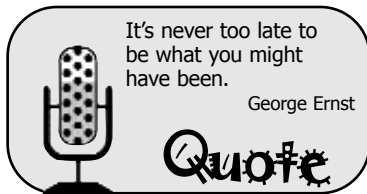
Explore Your Options

Planning to leave doesn't mean running to the next available position you find. When you're employed you have the luxury of searching for a position you really like.

You might consider:

- a promotion in your same area.
- a different position with the same employer.
- the same type of job with a different employer.
- another type of career altogether.

The alternative you pick determines how much time it will take to find a new position. Preparing for the next job could mean anything from going back to school to get a new degree or searching online for job openings.



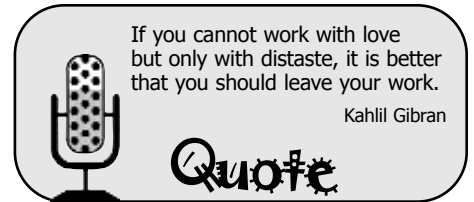
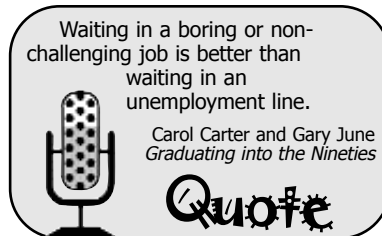
Improve Your Skills

You may want to get some formal education and/or training in order to change careers or advance in your current field.

You may finish your GED, obtain a college degree or take courses that will increase your skill level and marketability.

Before you return to school, however, be sure you have some specific goals in mind.

As the authors of *Graduating into the Nineties* explain, "Don't go back to school as a solution in itself. Your degree should be part of a long-term plan, not an end in itself."



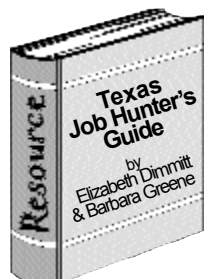
Actively Job Hunt

Job hunting usually entails talking with friends and colleagues about positions, looking at online listings or newspaper ads and reading journals and webpages to update yourself on upcoming opportunities in your field.

Meanwhile, you can see performing your current job as another way to actively hunt for a new one:

- **Do your best.** People are watching and you never know who might call you up and offer you a job.
- **Get as much experience as possible.** It increases your skills and makes yourself more marketable.
- **Attend conferences or workshops if possible.** They increase your knowledge and connect you with many people who might link you to a future position.
- **Create your own job.** Consider starting a business on the side. You might find that, like millions of Americans, you enjoy being your own boss.

Work on your own company after hours (and don't use any of your employer's materials or equipment!). If your home business grows, you may feel safe to quit your "day job."



A Texan Story

LaTasha planned to change careers. She had worked as a manager with the large retail store for several years and had come to dread going to work in the morning. She knew that she wasn't doing work that brought her joy.

She forced herself to show up and do a good job, however, because that's the kind of person her parents taught her to be.

Meanwhile, she used her wages to pay for computer training.

Today, LaTasha works as a computer programmer and network administrator for a small, dynamic firm. Every day, she does work she loves. She doesn't regret her years at the retail job, though. It paid for the education she needed to do her heart's desire.

