

Don't Wait to Be Great

Do you hate your job? If so, you are not alone – whatever your title, your tenure, your salary. Workers everywhere feel over-worked, underappreciated, stressed out and on-edge. They are ready to bolt but afraid to quit because of an uncertain job market. Instead they do what they have to in order to get by, waiting in the wings with resumes in hand (like a resume would help, anyway). They dream of a better time, and wait to be great.



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“I’m going to have an extraordinary career... just as soon as I land my next job”.

There is a crisis of disengagement at work. Consider the following:

- ◆ A study by Accenture says that 48% of U.S. middle managers are either looking for a new job or plan to do so the minute the economy improves.
- ◆ A study by Sibson Consulting reports that a full 50% of the people polled would take a new job for just \$1,000 worth of equity, even if the stock couldn’t be sold for 3 years. 50% would leave for 10 extra vacation days, and 75% would leave for 15 more vacation days.
- ◆ Research by the Gallop Organization suggests that 75% of employees in most companies are not engaged at work, costing the U.S. economy between \$292 billion and \$355 billion a year.

No one can afford to wait to be extraordinary. There are profound costs that go far beyond salary and compensation. You compromise your self-esteem, resilience, optimism, and long term marketability.

If you hate what you do or where you are doing it, here are some things you can do right away to break out of this downward cycle.

1. **Do your current job as best you can. Do not compromise your own standards of success.** So you have a crazy boss who can’t communicate. So you have no resources to get your work done. Okay – you have a toxic co-worker who makes mistakes that you have to clean up in addition to getting your own job done. Grab a seat...there’s a whole lot of people in the same boat.

Do your personal best anyway. Focus on what you **can** do instead of what you **can’t** do. Delivering excellent work product will give you a sense of pride and accomplishment even if others around you don’t hold up their end of the bargain. You will have examples of success to offer as you find new opportunities; you will have a more self-confidence, you

will interview better and you will create more options both in and out of your current company. It's easy to be great when everything is going your way. It requires a strong inner compass to be positive and realistically optimistic when things stink. Know what you can control and devise coping strategies for the rest.

2. Don't Count on A Great Boss

In your lifetime you are lucky if you get one or two great bosses. That's why you remember them so clearly! If you've got a bad one, here's good news: things will change soon. The average person changes jobs every 3-5 years (although somehow lousy bosses seem to linger forever). Now here's the bad news: the same is true if you love your boss. You can't steer your career in search of the perfect boss. Make your professional decisions based on what *you* want to achieve, and in the meantime learn to work for all kinds of bosses. Getting along with difficult people is one of the first skills of leadership.

3. Be the leader you wish you had

Do *you* like working for someone who is detached, volatile, uncommunicative, and irritable? Of course not. These traits are highly toxic and they rub off on people. While you are in a situation where you are exposed to these "chemicals", protect yourself by practicing deliberate optimism and resilience. These are the antidotes to this chemical poisoning. Be the person you wish you worked for. See what happens.

4. Plot your course; learn continuously

The greatest weapon you have in career self-defense is a strong awareness of who you are and where you are going. Do a professional assessment to help you define that direction. Every job you take should position you to get closer and closer to your long range goal. That way, little things won't bother you as much. It will make your life far more tolerable.

As you clarify your path, make sure you are always learning something new. Take on projects outside your department; enroll in classes that upgrade your skills, stretch out of your comfort zone. If you know that you want to develop your presentation skills in order to land your next position, make sure you practice them in your current job. If no presentation opportunities are forthcoming because your management team keeps you in your office working on reports, *create* the opportunities. Don't whine about it – it's *your* responsibility to make sure you get what you need.

5. Career excellence requires *active* career management.

That means creating professional options at all times. People that have the most options are people that are extraordinary in the face of the blues. It makes you stand out. It makes you different. Do not succumb to the poison of disengagement! Do what you can where you are, while you explore your options. If you wait to be great, you get used to being a mediocre performer. Don't let anyone convince you to settle for mediocrity – it's *your* career and it's your life. Invest in a professional coach that can help you navigate across the lifespan of that career, providing support, strategies, and direction.

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