

## **Unhappy in Your Job? Fix Things or Go Elsewhere**

By Mary Mitchell

Perhaps you're stuck in a job you don't love. Or maybe a comfortable job has grown stale. If you're someone who measures yourself by your career, these can be tough situations. It's no crime to feel out of step with your 9-to-5 gig. But it's best to fix that fit as soon as possible. A tweak or two can make your position better than ever.

### **Be True To Yourself**

The key is to make an honest appraisal of your situation and your priorities. Some people live to work, but most work to live. Plan your life accordingly, without apology - even if your job is not at the top of your list.

As a Washington hotel executive puts it: "Basically, I like my job, but I resent the commitment of time required to satisfy its demands. In the meantime, we give lip service to the importance of being good parents and having solid family lives."

If that sounds like you, refocus on life off the job. That means having friends unrelated to work, activities that aren't "networking opportunities," and pleasures that don't "build skills."

"I do my best to surround myself with good friends and positive people who help recharge me when my batteries run low," the executive says.

### **See What You Can Bring to the Organization**

Allow work to be one slice of the pie of life - and enjoy the whole thing. Freshen your outlook.

Maybe your work-life balance is fine, but your job motivation has simply stalled. If so, ask yourself why, says Anna Loh, director of human resources at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Perhaps you've outgrown your responsibilities. Loh suggests re-imagining your job in a way that would reawaken interest. Whatever your level, there may be new procedures you can develop or new duties you can assume.

Bring your manager ideas that can jump-start your motivation while improving your organization. Your initiative will look good, and a new project may be just the tonic you need.

If you can't change your job, "look around your company to see if there's a committee or task force you can join," Loh says. "It will give you experience in another area and exposure to other sides of the company. And it's a great networking tool."

### **Mind Your Own Business**

Personal issues often refuse to stay obediently at home when we go to work. They can have a big impact on job performance.

If personal problems are plaguing your professional life, you must deal with them - but you don't have to go it alone. Talk with your manager to see how you might temporarily shift your duties. Ask friends or relatives for their perspective and suggestions.

### **Patch Up People Problems**

Co-worker conflicts can sabotage the best of jobs. Don't let them tank yours.

Heed these survival tips of a television executive who triumphed over more than two years of predatory players and politics:

- Refuse to discuss personalities.
- Stick to observable behavior, goals and objectives.
- Keep your messages dispassionate. For example: "When the copy is not turned in until Friday, we have no opportunity to edit it thoughtfully and still make the Monday deadline without incurring overtime." If you're challenged, try something like: "It just seems to me that this approach accomplishes what we're trying to do better than any other."
- Remain professional. Don't get sucked into games, and don't gossip.
- Reward yourself, especially during tough times, with dinners with friends, movies and good books.

### **If There's No Place Else To Turn, Head Out**

If all else fails, consider seeking a new position, Loh says. Make this your last resort, especially if you like your company and co-workers. But don't be afraid to make a change.

"It's OK to say, 'I'm moving on,' " says Loh. "It's OK to say, 'I've done all I can do, and it's time for bigger and better things.'"