

Finding Work that makes you Happy

If you know you hate your job, then you'll know that it's time to leave. But if you have a vague feeling that things are just not as good as they could be, and aren't quite sure what to do about it ... read on!

Introduction

I have not always believed that work could be fulfilling, challenging and enjoyable.

Like most of us, I've been through a range of feelings about work from apathy, anger and frustration, to enjoyment, enthusiasm and satisfaction. Several times in my work life, I've been overwhelmed by tasks or underwhelmed by my job, but every challenge has enabled me to change something – either about my job or about myself. Each change has taken me closer to realising my passion, and taught me more about what I dream for myself, those around me, and the wider world.

My passion is to work with people who want to change something about their working lives. I know from experience that dissatisfaction at work can be stressful, miserable and all-consuming, sapping your energy and making change difficult and daunting... just at a time when change is what is needed!

Are you in the wrong job?

If you're in a job where your boss is a bully; you hate your working environment; your colleagues are unfriendly; your customers are unpleasant; and you commute for hours each day, then this is easy to answer: you're in the wrong place!

If however you have a vague feeling that things aren't as good they *could* be... you're not getting *quite* what you need... that you have a lot of bad days (but some OK days)... then maybe it's time to consider why you're not getting what you want and deserve and what you can do about it.

I find the **Rule of Three**, developed by Michael Eales of Global Resonance, a helpful way of looking at this:

1. Is it me?
2. Is it them?
3. Is it the environment?

1. Is it me?

Some questions to ask yourself:

- Are you doing what you want to do? Are you where you want to be?
- What is keeping you where you are?
- How does what you are doing now compare to what you wanted to do as a child/ student/ young adult?
- Are you fulfilling other people's dreams (e.g. partner, parent, friend, colleague) by doing this job?
- What do you want to change?
- What do you hope/fear would happen if you made changes?
- What parts of yourself are not being expressed in your job? In your life?
- How much do you identify your Self with your job/role/company?
- What image of you comes across to other people? What do you not show?
- What is it like for other people to work with you?
- What patterns do you repeat in your life, both positive and negative?

An honest appraisal of who you are, where you are, how you got there and where you want to be is a solid first step towards change.

2. Is it them?

Although it may sometimes feel like we work alone, we don't. We work in groups, departments and teams; with suppliers and customers, i.e. through relationships and communication. Ideally our relationships would be authentic and trouble-free in all areas of our lives. But in the real world, problems, major and minor, do arise. We all have our own ways of being, but when other people's "ways" cause us difficulty, life can be unpleasant and painful.

Some questions that could help you to understand your interpersonal and group dynamics?

- What is the purpose you share with your colleagues? How is that being/not being fulfilled?
- What, or who, is getting in the way?
- Have you any "unfinished business" with anyone around you, e.g. any lingering resentment or other unresolved conflict/emotion that is getting in the way of your relationship now?

- How are you being misunderstood or mistreated, and can you change that?
- Are you being limited by other peoples' beliefs – either now or from your past?
- Are your abilities and contributions being ignored or overlooked?
- Who do you need support from?
- Have you and your abilities become stereotyped by others?

We can't change other people, but we can change our interaction with them.

3. *Is it the environment?*

A lot of organisations say "our business is about our people" but you'd never know it from being one of their employees! These organisations are missing out. People want to be part of something meaningful – working together is a deep and tribal instinct and success as part of a team is immensely satisfying and energising. Many other things affect our energy for work, including commuting and the environment that we work in.

Culture affects our behaviour and our behaviour affects the culture. Sometimes we can find our personal choices being compromised by an organisation's culture and values. Then we might discover it is not "the done thing" to challenge the organisation, whatever it might say in the company brochure! Organisational values need to be more than lip-service. There are a lot of dehumanised organisations around, existing within our larger, dehumanised global economic and political system. From within any such system, it takes an awful lot to say "This is not OK! I want something different."

We can't single-handedly change a culture, but we can act according to own values.

Exploring your situation honestly and authentically through this "Rule of Three" can stimulate a lot of thinking, feeling and ideas.

The nature of work

So, what is the reality of working life? This is my view:

- The in-tray is never empty
- The goal posts will move

- You will have more demands for your time than you can manage (and they will conflict)
- Personal lives don't disappear during working hours
- Things will go wrong (especially computer systems!)
- There will be restructuring/moves/redundancies/customer changes
- You will not think everyone you work with is a wonderful person
- You may not feel like leaping out of bed on a Monday morning
- Working for a prolonged time under stressful conditions will make you ill

So, maybe, there is *some* truth to the stereotyped negative picture of work in our society, but let's not forget that we have a lot of control over what we do with our lives. Of course there are bills to pay, but there are lots of ways we can choose to do that. According to a University of Warwick study in 2002, 36% of Britons would like to spend more time with their friends and family. A staggering 85% of Americans would like to see their friends and families more. In response to these figures, the researcher concludes... " And yet they could have it if they tried. They are rich" . Of course there is some global truth to this, but the personal reality is never that straightforward.

Whatever we get from our work in terms of financial rewards, personal development and emotional satisfaction, positive or negative, we carry it through to our personal lives.

Work is a opportunity to be ourselves, to express ourselves, and to extend ourselves: *being at work doesn't mean that we can't also be at play.*

What makes a job more than "just a job"?

Pay, work/life balance, challenge and travel are always on the list when we choose our jobs. But consider how your job measures up on the following:

- **Role models** – do you admire the people you work with? Can you see how you will learn from them? Are you nurtured, and can you nurture people around you?
- **Values** – do you know what values your company has? Are they real? Do you agree with them? Are you compromising any of your personal values by working there?
- **Working environment** – is it friendly? Do you have enough light, warmth, cool, water, comfort, quiet? Can you control your environment? Can you work at home?

- **Creativity** – do you get a chance to have ideas and express them? Do you have a chance to implement new ideas? Can you achieve your objectives in a variety of ways?
- **Diversity** – is there a diversity of people and behaviours around, or are things always done in a certain way by people who are all a certain type?
- **Communication** – do you understand what goes on around you? Are you consulted and informed? Can you share good and bad days?
- **Development** – do you have the chance for meaningful personal and professional development, or are you just accumulating responsibilities and job titles?

Making the change.

Firstly, use some time and energy to explore if you're truly ready for and committed to a change, whether it is big or small. Don't force a change – there can be good reasons for *not* changing things, or at least not for now. Assessing your own inclination now for change in the future will set the scene for when the time and conditions *are* right. It can also enable you to feel less like you're "stuck", and more like the way things are is what you're choosing consciously for the moment.

Secondly, remember that change does not have to be huge to make a significant difference to your life. You may just want to work from home, work different hours, ask a colleague to be a mentor or even change the location of your desk!

Thirdly, make sure the things that you wish to change are within your control, i.e. to do with yourself and your situation, and not other people, or situations you can't influence.

Consider who you can support you – partner and family, friends, a trusted colleague, or a professional coach/counsellor. Consider how you are going to support yourself – e.g. making time and space to reflect, feel and think. You may feel like combining this reflection with a holiday or extended period of leave, or finding other creative ways of giving yourself the time and space that you need. If there is to be any impact on your income and lifestyle, think and plan for this honestly – will you really switch from caviar and taxis to baked beans and buses overnight?!

Finally, remember that you may have to make changes many times - keep moving until you find what you're looking for. Stick with change... it can get to be a habit that rewards you with a rich and fulfilling life.

About the author

Bella Sturt is a facilitator and coach with twelve years' experience of business management and consultancy. She has been employed by the Current Science Group, Deloitte Consulting, BBC News, and a dot.com company that went bust. She has worked in the public, private and voluntary sectors, and also in various freelance roles including as a music teacher and as an HR advisor. She is now director of Enspiral Ltd.

Bella specialises in coaching, facilitation and change management around life and career changes. She is in the final stages of a Postgraduate Diploma in Humanistic Psychology from the Institute for the Development of Human Potential (IDHP).

Readers of this article are offered a free consultation of up to 1_ hours, with verbal and written reflection and feedback. Contact: bella@enspiral.co.uk