

# CHAPTER

# 1

## Curing the Workplace Blues



**W**hen was the last time you were so passionate about your work that it didn't seem like work at all? Or truly excited by all the new stuff you were learning on your job? Or genuinely couldn't wait to get up and head to the office because your bosses and colleagues were so much fun to work with? Has it been a while since you felt the eagerness and butterflies you had during your very first week at your job? Has that professional spark been doused, or is it still flickering, just waiting to be reignited?

Choose a job you really love and you will never feel like you're working another day. But what should you do if the thrill is gone? Is it really possible to get your groove back? Yes! What if you never had it in the first place? Yes, you can get in the groove.

If you're not there yet—and I assume you're not if you're reading this book—you've got company. About 50 percent of workers say they're unsatisfied with their jobs, and only 15 percent say they are very satisfied, according to a recent report by the Conference Board, a business membership and research group that has been conducting surveys about worker happiness since 1987.

Workers are least satisfied with promotion policy, bonus plan, training programs, performance review, and recognition, according to the most recent survey. Not surprisingly, high-income earners are more satisfied than lower-paid workers—and the gap has been

widening in recent years. The survey found 64 percent satisfaction among those making \$125,000 and over.

Another dismal report was the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint survey, administered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. It revealed a federal workforce whose satisfaction on the job has steadily waned since 2010. The percentage of respondents satisfied with their jobs fell to 64 percent in 2014 from 72 percent four years ago. Pay satisfaction has fallen, too.

The latest declines, however, follow on the heels of a few years of federal employee pay freezes, along with higher health care costs tapping into paychecks. Not surprisingly, the survey also found that fewer workers would say their agency is a good place to work for anyone interested in joining the troupe. That number fell to 62 percent this year from 70 percent in 2010.

The fact is Americans are quitting their jobs at the fastest pace since early 2008. In October of 2014, 2.8 million people quit a job, the most since April 2008, according to the Labor Department's monthly Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, known as JOLTS that was released in November.

Millions of people currently in the workforce could use a little career boost to keep their work a source of enjoyment—for lots of reasons. While many people are comfortable with their current jobs, they may feel an underlying tension that they won't be prepared should a merger or marketplace change put their job in jeopardy. That anxiety may linger beneath the surface. Other people may work for a company that has gone through a period of cost-cutting, eliminating positions and suddenly leaving less room for advancement and growth. The path to promotion is not always there, or at least not clear. They feel like they're trapped in a dead-end job.

But just saying "take this job and shove it" is probably not the best approach to battling your boredom or pent-up frustration. Quitting is generally not a good option, unless you already have a new position lined up elsewhere or you already have the means to retire—in which case, lucky you.

If you're tempted to quit without a safety net, keep in mind the statistics: In the United States, unemployment generally lasts around 50 weeks for workers over 55 and 30 weeks for workers under 55, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And a recent report by the International

Labour Organization, a UN agency, stated that “in many advanced economies, the duration of unemployment has doubled in comparison with the pre-crisis situation,” referring to the global economic downturn that exploded in 2008. The average length of joblessness, for example, recently hit nine months in Greece and eight months in Spain.

So no, you don’t necessarily want to just throw in the towel on your current job. But don’t worry. The truth is that finding happiness and fulfillment in the workplace doesn’t always mean a big swerve from the past, or starting from scratch in a new job or career. It does, however, often call on the courage to make necessary but sometimes uncomfortable and even painful changes. You may need to take a long, hard, honest look within yourself to figure out what’s holding you back from making modifications to your current job.

*Love Your Job* will show you how.

You may need to engage in some thoughtful sleuthing and inner soul-searching to figure where you can uncover new challenges and opportunities in your working life. You may need to dig deep down to tap the energy and determination needed to make the necessary moves. But even small ones have the potential to deliver big rewards. If you really want to love your job, you must first be able to step back and appreciate what’s going right about it, even if there are times when you dread that upcoming assignment, meeting with the boss, or lunch with a difficult client.

You’ll need patience, because change doesn’t always happen on your time schedule. But you also need to start the ball rolling, even if just a little bit at the start.

In the following pages, you will learn ways to do just that.

### **Should You Switch Careers?**

I’m a big advocate of following your heart to do work that you love, and I’ve written extensively and speak frequently about career transition to audiences around the country. Many of us at this time in our lives feel the allure of a career switch to follow a dream, often one from childhood, or to find work with meaning and purpose. When things go sour at work, many people imagine starting over in a second act or a new career to pursue a long-standing passion. They fancy it will be their magic elixir.

And it can be. In my book *What's Next? Finding Your Passion and Your Dream Job in Your Forties, Fifties, and Beyond*, I highlight stories of people who succeeded at doing just that. If you're thinking along those lines, I support you, but be aware: Most of those people work harder than they ever have. Still, they find that it's worth it, and they love what they do.

Here's the truth: In recent months, I have found through hundreds of meetings, interviews, and consultations with people seeking career advice that the big shift isn't always practical for many people—regardless of how miserable they are in their jobs. It's not that there isn't the will. But when it comes to the way, there are sobering stumbling blocks. Inertia can hold you back. The fear of failure when you make a big career shift and begin all over again in a new field can be paralyzing.

And at the heart of it, the biggest roadblock is money. Not having employer-provided health insurance and retirement benefits is a genuine concern. Then too, when you start over in a new field, particularly if it's a nonprofit, you can generally expect to earn less, at least initially. And when you go the entrepreneurial route, you may need to forgo a salary entirely for a year or more until your business gains traction.

When I press people who seek my advice on what they really want to do with their work lives, I have found that many people don't actually feel the urge to make a huge career shift. They kind of like their job, and they just need to get their dance back.

And this is what I tell them and what I'm telling you: You *can* fall back in love with your job again, even if you've been doing it for decades. And if you never loved your job in the first place, I can help you find ways to enjoy it more—or at least like it enough to take some pleasure in it. Many paths can lead you to this place. You can discover how to make old workplaces feel fresh, and learn ways to raise your hand that will open doors to new experiences and career moves. It's never too late to make your job a source of joy, as well as a paycheck.

### **DO I REALLY HATE MY JOB? OR IS IT BURNOUT?**

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Job burnout is far more than just feeling trapped and uninterested in your work. New research from jobs site Monster.com finds that a staggering four in five workers experience burnout at their jobs.

According to the Mayo Clinic, “Job burnout is a special type of job stress—a state of physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion combined with doubts about your competence and the value of your work.”

The clinic’s web site has a list of questions to help you decide if you’re experiencing job burnout. Here are some of them:

- Have you become cynical or critical at work?
- Do you drag yourself to work and have trouble getting started once you arrive?
- Have you become irritable or impatient with coworkers, customers, or clients?
- Do you lack the energy to be consistently productive?
- Do you lack satisfaction from your achievements?
- Do you feel disillusioned about your job?
- Are you using food, drugs, or alcohol to feel better or to simply not feel?
- Have your sleep habits or appetite changed?
- Are you troubled by unexplained headaches, backaches, or other physical complaints?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be experiencing job burnout. Be sure to consult with your doctor. Some of these symptoms can also indicate certain health conditions, such as a thyroid disorder or depression, according to the web site.

Plenty of factors can trigger burnout. They include a sense of powerlessness to influence decisions that affect your job such as your schedule, assignments, or workload; not having the resources you need to do your work; and working with an office bully or a micromanager boss. If you feel isolated at work, you may feel more stressed. If your job is monotonous, that can push you over the edge, too. And of course, your work-life balance could be out of whack—too much work, not enough life—which I discuss in later chapters.

*(continued)*

Burnout can result in a multitude of medical problems, from fatigue and insomnia to depression, anxiety, alcohol or substance abuse, and even heart disease and a vulnerability to other illnesses, according to the Mayo Clinic's medical experts.

## Chin Up!

Trust me—I know how easy it is to complain about a job that's flat-lined or a bad boss. I've done it myself. But it never makes the situation better. Ever. So stop it right now. No one really cares about your kvetching. They will listen politely at first, but then you become nothing more than a tiresome broken record. Whining is not the path to career happiness. The squeaky-wheel approach? Yes, that can work. But just complaining and not doing anything? Forget about it.

If you want to be happier, you have to do something, to take action. "Speak now or forever hold your peace," as my dad always said. In other words, get that hand waving wildly in the air and make some noise.

Here's another analogy that works for me, as an equestrienne: Say I'm cantering toward a jump on my horse, and I keep missing the proper distance to ask her to jump from. At times like this, despite more than four decades of competing at the top tier of the sport, I'm generally feeling defeated in my ability to ride successfully. I fight back the urge to blame my horse for not responding properly to my leg and hand signals, or my trainer for building a jump that is just too difficult for us. Still, I get frustrated and angry with myself, and I'm filled with the impulse to give up.

That's when my trainer says, "Why not make a different turn to the fence, change your approach, plan a different path?" It comes down to a subtle shift in how I navigate, and perhaps a slight adjustment in pace. Only a real aficionado of the sport would discern it, but inevitably, when I heed my trainer's advice, my horse and I find the perfect spot and we take flight. I smile. Job well done. I can't wait to do it again.

What I am driving (or galloping) at here is that you have to learn to focus on remedies, not faults. It's hard to act. But once you have a plan, you'll be surprised at how empowering it can be.

### Take It Up a Notch

*Love Your Job* is about raising your game with your current job and finding value and meaning in the work you do week in and week out. But finding ways to love your work entails taking ownership of your life. No one is going to wave a magic wand for you. You may have to take a risk. And nothing happens overnight. In essence, you need to constantly ask yourself, "What can I do to improve myself on the job?" not "What can my boss do for me?"

A 58-year-old producer at *60 Minutes* recently told me that while he loves producing great documentaries for a primetime news show, he is well aware that his field is in flux. To keep fresh, every year he sets himself a goal—to learn someone else's job, add further skills, study something new. "For example, this year I'm going to learn how to edit in my spare time," he says.

He has to carve out the time to take on the new goals, but it's mentally engaging and gets him out of his comfort zone. It also allows him to have a better appreciation of the work his coworkers perform and builds a sense of camaraderie when he asks them to teach him. He assures them he is not trying to wrest their job from them, or become an editor, but simply to learn more about the process. At the very core, it can create new friendships at work, but that's not all. "I guess the best part of it is that I get a kick out of learning something new that helps me do my job better," he says. "I love that."

That's the approach I want you to take. My goal is to provide you with the tips you need to thrive in your current work—to build new outlooks, find satisfaction around the edges of your daily duties, and craft a more entrepreneurial attitude toward your job. I will show you ways to examine your job responsibilities, your work rituals, and your attitudes toward your work. And I will show you how to ask the hard questions: What new habits or routines can you craft to bring more love to your workday? What inner changes can you make to rekindle your hope, eagerness, and resilience? How can you learn to celebrate even your smallest successes?

In the process, you will glean how you can identify what makes you feel good about work, and how to recognize the negative thoughts that creep up in your loop of self-defeating talk. You will learn that by truly looking someone in the eye, listening, and supporting your colleagues and championing their successes, you can renew your own energy, gain confidence, and build the resources to face new challenges.

My approach is a positive, can-do look at work that offers creative solutions. Bottom line: You will find novel ways to design your job around love. This is a book about taking control of your own workplace happiness, but it's grounded in the real world. This is not pie-in-the-sky conjecture. These are actionable steps.

### **Loving Your Job**

I believe you really can learn to love your job. I do. I'm a romantic that way. Love is a complicated thing. It can be fleeting. You have to give it to get it. And at times it takes effort to hold on to it. At the heart of it, a job, like romance, is never utterly full of bliss and joy.

Sometimes work is like climbing a mountain, says Dan Ariely, who teaches psychology and behavioral economics at Duke University. This is how he explains it: When you're on your trek, it's cold. You're physically exhausted. But you care about the fight, the challenge, and when you come back down, you want to do it again. All kinds of things can motivate us to work, he says. But Ariely has found one thing is clear: Like mountain climbing, when there is some effort involved, most people love it even more.

What doesn't motivate us is the Sisyphean horror of pushing the same boulder up the same hill over and over, he points out. That's the essence of doing futile work, says Ariely. We all need some sense of progress. It's demotivating just doing the same thing again and again.

What it means to love your job is a mash-up of effort and joy, good days and bad days. That said, researchers studying the application of positive psychology to the workplace concur that a positive mind-set affects our attitudes toward work as well as the results that follow. In the following chapters, I hope to inspire you to focus on your strengths, to give yourself credit—even for small successes—and, yes, to be grateful. These are essential ingredients to being happy at

work. You will discover the best ways to fight back against the stress, anxiety, and even boredom that any job can sometimes involve.

## The “HOVER” Approach

In Chapter 4, you will discover the core elements that comprise my HOVER approach to revamping your work life. The acronym HOVER involves looking down, surveying the situation, and then strategically employing the five basic ingredients you need to create the change you’re looking for—hope, optimism, value, enthusiasm, and resilience. (See “The HOVER Approach” sidebar.)

You will see firsthand how others have made these changes. You will learn from interviews with leading workplace psychologists, career coaches, experts on positive psychology, and professors at leading universities around the world about why having an open

### THE HOVER APPROACH

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HOVER stands for the five core ingredients you must have, or will need to develop, to create change in your working life.

- **Hope** is essential. When you have confidence that you can reach your goals, you will find a way to do so.
- **Optimism** allows you to have a positive approach, which helps you keep pushing ahead even when there are roadblocks.
- **Value** means knowing that you have something to offer—the skills and talent to get results and make progress, if you put out the effort.
- **Enthusiasm** is the intangible “oomph” factor that provides the energy needed to make those necessary changes, both internally and externally.
- **Resilience**, the knack for springing back in the face of adversity or failure, is indispensable to achieve happiness at work.

mind and always looking to learn something new, to take up professional development and training opportunities, and to face other challenges will keep your work fresh, meaningful, and moving forward—regardless of your age or the stage of your career.

I have found through my research that many midcareer workers tend to avoid new challenges on the job or assignments that feel like a stretch. They worry too much about whether they have the skills needed to take on a loftier new role. They fret about failing, so they cling grimly to doing only what they already know and feel comfortably safe performing. When offered an opportunity, they fall back on the excuse that they're unfamiliar with that kind of work or that it isn't what they went to school for. I advise them to shift from thinking "I'm not ready to do that" to thinking "I want to do that—and I'll learn by doing it."

*Love Your Job* will encourage you to be more open to taking risks at work. Allow yourself to fantasize about your career, to really soul-search. I believe we all should have long-term aspirations of where we would like to be in a year, two years, and five years. Pursuing flexible workplace goals that you set for these predetermined time periods will help keep you motivated as you learn new skills and take on new challenges.

### Get a Grip

As New Agey as it sounds, you will also learn that part of loving your job involves loving yourself and paying attention to your body and your soul. To love what you do each day, you need to be physically, spiritually, and financially fit. Think about it: How many times have felt that you are running so fast that you barely have time to think? How often do you actually allow yourself to pause and listen to what your body, your heart, and your mind are telling you?

Talk with enough happy workers and you'll find that the secret is feeling in control: having a job that offers you a bigger say in what goes on at work, more flexibility in scheduling day-to-day activities, and more opportunities to pursue professional passions and develop new skills. Increased autonomy, too, will frequently lead to increased satisfaction. I'm reminded of the poem "Invictus" by the English poet William Ernest Henley, which I have been told Nelson Mandela, who

was imprisoned for 27 years, had written out on a scrap of paper. The last two lines of “Invictus” read, “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.”

Be patient—it can take a little time. But “find a way,” as the 64-year-old endurance swimmer Diana Nyad said after completing her inspiring swim from Cuba to Key West, Florida, on her fifth try. In September 2013, Nyad swam 110 miles across the fearsome Florida Straits in just 52 hours and 54 minutes—the first person to do so without fins or a shark cage.

“It’s not so much the physical,” Nyad told the Associated Press a day after finishing her record-setting swim. “To my mind all of us . . . we mature emotionally . . . and we get stronger mentally because we have a perspective on what this life is all about. It’s more emotional. I feel calmer. I feel that the world isn’t going to end if I don’t make it. And I’m not so ego-involved: ‘What are people going to think of me?’ I’m really focused on why I want to do it.” Her message: “Never, ever give up.”

Nyad’s inspiring comments tell me that you can’t get caught up in the drama and emotion of what’s holding you back from finding happiness in your work. You can’t act based on what others expect of you. You can’t do a job simply because it’s someone else’s vision for you, or you’re worried about what others will say if you make a move to a new department or want to step back from some of your duties to find more balance in your life.

This is *your* life, naysayers be damned. Who cares if someone says you’re foolish to want to swim with sharks, if that’s the goal you’ve set for yourself? What matters is why *you* want to do it. It’s virtually impossible to make a big life change, or stretch for a new goal, if you’re doing it for someone else’s approval or respect, or worried what others might think.

The only way I’ve been able to make a major transformation in my life, whether job-related or personal, is to do it for *myself*. Not for Dad, or my spouse, or my best friend, or even my career coach. You have to do it for yourself. That and only that will make the process meaningful and give you the chops to ride it to a successful conclusion, even though you may very well experience setbacks along the way. This is life, after all. Nyad can tell you all about that.

## How to Use This Book

*Love Your Job* is designed to show you how to make the best of your life and your career. It will help you get reinvigorated about your job. In these pages, you'll discover the ultimate guide to making your job a great one. I'll give you the action steps to take to make your job work for you. I'll deliver the professional advice and strategies I've been doling out as a career transition, retirement, and personal finance expert and journalist for more than two decades. Each chapter will conclude with a short recap and action steps to keep you working toward your goals.

I have arranged this book so you can dip in and out of the chapters as they apply to your situation. You'll find tips on how to renew your working life by getting involved with special projects, mentoring, meeting new people, asking for new responsibilities, finding work-life balance, and adding skills, training, and education. You'll learn how to think like an entrepreneur while working for someone else, have the "talk" with your supervisor or the human resources department, and make a sideways move and look for opportunities within your company.

Here are a few suggestions to consider before we start:

- You do have ways to change your job, but remember: The goal that is most important to you today may very well change to another down the road. You might have several aspects of your job that you'd like to change. That's all well and good, but focus on the small wins. Skip the big, bold goal. Don't try to do everything in one fell swoop.
- Start by doing one small thing that matters. When you move in small, incremental ways, you will have a fighting chance of getting your changes approved and set in motion. Truth is, sometimes all it takes to right your ship is that one special tweak.
- That said, if you're one breath away from quitting your job because you hate your immediate boss, drastic action might be required. (You probably won't be surprised to learn that the main reason people quit is an unbearable boss.) At the very least, you need to pause, review, and try to get some clarity. You might need to reach out to human resources for guidance. See my section on how to deal with bullying in Chapter 4.

## Curing the Workplace Blues

- My three-part fitness program (see Chapter 4) will help you prepare for making changes in your work and your attitude. You will discover why it is essential to be physically fit, financially fit, and spiritually fit to face the stress and demands of making changes in your career.

I wrote this book to help you find the work you love. Life is too short not to spend your time making a difference and finding meaning and joy in your daily work life. So let's go for it!

