

Deciding Whether You're in the Right Job

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Regardless of what you do for a living, it's human nature to wonder at times if you are in the right job. Most people spend at least some of their working life questioning themselves and their careers—and speculating about whether other occupations or work situations might be more fulfilling and make better use of their time and efforts.

If you've been thinking about these issues, it will help to analyze your situation as objectively as possible. A job is made up of many elements. It's not just the actual day-to-day work involved—it's a combination of elements that makes it work out for you or not. Your skills, of course, are fundamental to what you do, but do these match your interests? Might you have been very happy with a particular type of work during one phase of your life, but now feel that you need a change? And what about the company you work for? Is it the right size, in the right industry sector, with the right structure and culture? It's also worth examining how you feel about the people you work with, what your boss and co-workers are like, whether you have suitable levels of responsibility, what kind of remuneration you receive, and so on.

By looking at all these factors, you can establish whether your current position is a good match for you and your personality, and if not, what you need to do to make it right.

What You Need to Know

How do I know if I'm in the right job?

We all know what it's like to be in a job situation that feels completely wrong. But sometimes a person may be good at what they do and still not feel happy about their job. Most people want more from their work than simply being able to meet the basic requirements. You could be a very good builder because you're physically strong and fit, but you may have the soul of a philosopher, or an unfulfilled yearning to be a garden designer. When you are able to combine your interests and abilities into a way of making a living in a setting that you like, you will have found your ideal job. However, if you are happy in your work and don't feel a longing to move in other directions, you probably are in the right job—at least for the time being.

Most people have a number of facets to their personality. How can any one job be “The One?”

While most of us could do any of a number of different jobs and be reasonably happy and satisfied, it doesn't hurt to try to make the best fit possible for yourself. Broadly speaking, there are four main areas of personality which need to be fulfilled within a work context in order to be content with your

job. These are: your interests, job strengths, behavior under normal and stress conditions, and social perceptions and compatibility with others. If there is a mismatch between any of these four aspects and the job you are doing, it is unlikely that you will be comfortable in that job.

What to Do

Pinpoint the Issues and Activities That Excite You

Above everything else, if you're not interested in what you're doing or where you're doing it, you're never going to be able to put your heart into your work. So if your company, industry, subject, or sector doesn't engage you, it would be in your interest to start exploring how to identify one that does. Is there a topic, issue, or activity that you've enjoyed or been curious about for a long time...art, math, politics, social service, science, construction, the environment, for example? Or does a specific job attract you, possibly something that you've dismissed in the past as impractical, or one based on a hobby? Maybe you'd like to be a Web site designer, financial advisor, music teacher, painter/decorator, or reporter. There may be a specific industry that fascinates you—advertising, manufacturing, health care, electronics, entertainment, whatever—that you could explore further. Any area that piques your curiosity or makes you want to know more is a good place to start!

Identify Your Interests and Abilities

Once you've settled on an area of interest, or perhaps more than one, the next aspect to look at is whether a particular job makes the best use of your individual strengths. If it does, many of the other elements of satisfactory employment—self-fulfilment, motivation, a sense of achievement, a congenial workplace, and remuneration in line with your needs—fall naturally into place. So the first thing to do is to assess what your strengths are, and whether or not you're using them in your current position.

Your strengths can be defined as the areas where your interests and your abilities overlap to create the type of business activities that you both like *and* are good at. The two aren't necessarily the same! Take a look at the list below and (being honest with yourself!) put a check next to the activities you are interested in, and then against the ones you're good at. The activities against which you've put checks for both Interest and Ability are your main strengths. You may learn some surprising things about yourself! The list below is by no means exhaustive, so add any others you can think of that apply to you.

- Administration
- Analysis
- Budgeting
- Copywriting

- Creative thinking
- Decision making
- Empathy
- Facilitating
- Flexibility
- Initiative
- Innovation
- Interpretation
- Leadership
- Listening
- Mentoring
- Negotiation
- Operations
- Planning
- Problem solving
- Process management
- Project management
- Research
- Presentations
- Teamworking
- Vision

Once you've identified your strengths, consider how many of them you're using in your job, and in what way. Could you be doing more with them? Are there other areas of your current organization that might benefit from your strengths? Could you take on different responsibilities, or would a shift in the focus of your job make sense? If you feel under-utilized, try talking to your boss—most employers understand the benefits of making the maximum use of their employees' strengths, and they value people who are proactive in the way they approach their work. Unless you know that you are going to move on soon, use positive language and be as upbeat as you can when you address this with your boss. You don't want to sabotage the whole discussion by alarming him or her into thinking that you are going to leave immediately.

Consider the Fit between You and Your Employer

You may have found a good match between your strengths and the work you are doing, which is a good indication that you are in the right *type* of job. But are you also working for an organization

that suits your needs and personality? For example, you may be employed as an accountant in a big blue-chip corporation, when you'd actually be much happier overseeing the finances for a small family-run firm.

Think about the organization you work for. How big is it? Do you like working with a lot of people, or do you prefer a small, congenial group of co-workers? Apart from size, some of the other factors you might consider are whether your preferred place of employment would be public or private sector, profit or non-profit, national or multinational, academic or commercial, product or service oriented, and whether the management is centralized or decentralized. You'll also want to think about the organization's financial condition, political climate, company growth, current, and future stability, reputation, market dependency, profitability, and vulnerability to takeover.

Evaluate Your Salary and Benefits Requirements

One of your biggest considerations has to be the rewards you will receive for the work you do. While a salary and benefits package isn't going to be the only factor in your decision-making process, obviously you have needs that must be met. This is even more important if your circumstances require you to have a certain level of income or security. Remember that it's not just salary that should be considered—other benefits are equally important. A pension, life and disability insurance, health benefits, or a severance package could be vital if you have a family. On the other hand, if you're the kind of person who likes targets and goals, you might want to look for a firm that offers bonuses or other performance incentives to motivate you. If you're expected to travel or relocate, what provision is made for moving expenses, temporary living costs, or housing subsidy? Does the timing and amount of your vacation give you enough time with the children? What about a flexible work schedule or study leave?

Consider Your Personality

While there are many things to take into consideration when deciding whether or not a specific job is right for you, self-evaluation doesn't always occur to people. However, it is a crucial element. It can be extremely stressful to try to fill a role that simply isn't you. Much of this comes down to your own personal values, but useful areas to examine are as follows:

- **Interpersonal.** Do you like working closely with other people? Is it important to you that colleagues are also friends, or do you prefer to keep your private and work lives separate?
- **Responsibility.** How much do you want? Would you rather manage or be managed, or do you like working independently?
- **Pressure.** A high-stress hospital ward could be a nightmare for a mailman, while a peaceful publishing office might bore a sales rep to death. How much can you cope with?

- **Potential.** Are you a goal-oriented high flier with strong ambition and a need for regular advancement, or do you want a steady, secure job that will support your family?
- **Lifestyle compatibility.** Do you like a lot of business travel and high-powered meetings, or are you involved in family matters, hobbies, or other non-work commitments that you don't want to compromise? If you are pursuing an acting career, you may not want to give up your day job just yet, but you probably won't be able to take on any major roles and be a successful corporate lawyer at the same time.

What to Avoid

You Base Your Decision on Temporary Dissatisfaction

Nothing in life is perfect, and when the going gets rough it can be tempting to blame your troubles on your job and set off in search of another one. However, you don't want to move from one unsatisfactory situation into another. To avoid making this mistake, you'll need to do some serious thinking about what is making you feel dissatisfied. Is it financial considerations? Is your boss or a co-worker making you miserable? Could it be that you're simply bored at the moment, either with certain aspects of your job or your personal life? Might it be possible to resolve the problem with a little patience and effort? If you *do* decide it's time to move on, make sure you've done your homework first so that your new role brings real benefits and satisfaction.

You Neglect to Take Your Attitude into Account

Is it possible that you are focusing too much on the negative aspects of your job and not seeing the positive features? This is very useful to bear in mind when considering whether or not to look for a new position. And it's especially important if health concerns, family commitments, or other circumstances make it difficult for you to leave your current working situation. In this case, your challenge is to discover the benefits of your job and how you can make the most of it rather than fretting about being stuck. Quite often, contentment comes from the way you choose to perceive things. Is the glass half full or half empty? Learning to see things from a new perspective can make all the difference in how you feel about something!

Where to Learn More

Web Sites:

About Human Resources: <http://humanresources.about.com/od/careerandjobsearchhelp>

Handbag.com: www.handbag.com/careers/careerchange

HR.BLR.com: <http://hr2.blr.com>

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