

Increasing Job Satisfaction

By BNET Editorial

published on BNET.com 11/09/2007

There is a big difference between temporary and permanent job dissatisfaction. If the situation is only temporary, you can take steps to improve your level of satisfaction. Otherwise, it may be time for a serious career reorientation.

Poor levels of job satisfaction are linked to stress, and in extreme situations, burnout. Even if you're not working to your full capacity, your job may be exhausting you. David Whyte touches on this subject in his book "Crossing the Unknown Sea." In discussing the concept with a wise mentor and friend, he said, "Tell me about exhaustion." His mentor replied, "You know that the antidote to exhaustion is not necessarily rest?" "No? What is it, then?" he returned. "The antidote to exhaustion is *wholeheartedness*."

Perhaps this is the clue. Increasing job satisfaction is about engaging with your personal quest *wholeheartedly*; not about finding ways to keep yourself busy and distracted—both from boredom or from the burdens of your professional responsibilities.

What You Need to Know

When I wake up in the morning, I dread going into work. When I get home in the evening, I find myself too weary to enjoy socializing or doing something creative. I am doing the work that I have always wanted to do. What is going on?

You may find that it is not the work that is the problem but the context in which you are doing it. Perhaps the values of the organization that you work for are not aligned to your own, or perhaps your talents are not being put to good use. Ask yourself what you would be doing if you were really happy at work. Is it possible to renegotiate the boundaries of your role so that you can find contentment in your current position?

I have always put everything into my work but have never chosen what it is I want to do. I am increasingly feeling dissatisfied that I am not on a career path. What do I need to do to find my vocation?

You may find that you are doing what you are vocationally inclined to do, but because you have chosen it "passively" and not "actively" it appears to be dissatisfying. You are unlikely to be doing

something that is in opposition to your true vocation so look for those aspects of your role that excite and reward you and choose them consciously.

I am extremely conscientious and deliver my work on time and to a high standard. However, I am frequently asked to finish off my colleagues' work when they do not complete it on time. I am really fed up. What should I do?

It seems that you are not being recognized and rewarded for your contributions and probably feel taken for granted. Have you thought of taking control of the situation and giving feedback to your colleagues? Perhaps you could use assertive language and say "No" to some of the additional tasks you are being asked to take on. Once you "push back," you may find that you will be treated with more respect and appreciation.

Surely, as a manager, I am not responsible for ensuring members of my team enjoy a high level of job satisfaction. I expect them to take responsibility for their own professional well-being and not expect to be spoon-fed.

This is not about spoon-feeding high levels of satisfaction, it is about creating an environment in which people can contribute their best efforts, perform well, and achieve high levels of success. As a manager, you have the ability to impact the working environment considerably, so think about how you can give your team a greater sense of involvement and how you can demonstrate your recognition and appreciation of their efforts.

What to Do

It is well known that for most people, money, holidays, and other perks do not correlate with high levels of job satisfaction. These "hygiene" factors tend to be outweighed by the less tangible aspects of a job. Being engaged in something meaningful which is delivered in an environment that reflects an individual's values and beliefs is, seemingly, the perfect combination. In brief, our "work" does not work for us if we are doing something we love in a hostile environment, or if we are doing something we dislike in a benign environment. It does not work, either, if we get the worst of both worlds and end up doing something we dislike in a hostile environment! So, increasing job satisfaction demands that we weave together several different strands. These include vocation, talent, and circumstance.

Identify What It Is You Want to Do

Most of us go to work with an aspiration to make a difference. This may be in an operational environment where products and services are delivered, on the customer interface where relationships and rapport-building skills are important, or in the strategic environment where organizational goals seek to win in a market or respond to a cause. Whatever your vocational drivers are, it is important to make sure that they are placed in an environment that is conducive—an environment where your talent, skills, and experience are relevant and valued. This suggests that you need to understand yourself well enough to know what you want to, and can, contribute.

Many people bemoan the fact that they are well along their career paths and still do not know what they want to achieve or be! If you can answer the question: “What do you want to be when you grow up?”, then you are one of the fortunate ones. If this question elicits the response “I just don’t know!”, then you have some work to do.

If you are struggling to identify your vocation, think back on your professional life to date and ask yourself when you were most happy and rewarded by your work. Try to recall what you were doing during these high points, and see if you can recall the elements that made these so rewarding and worthwhile. If you can find three or four of these high points, ask yourself what the common theme that connects them is. This may point toward your vocation. If you find this difficult, try entering the exploration from a different angle and identify the underpinning features of your most unhappy professional times. This will delineate the professional “exclusion zone,” the area you should avoid in the future. Once you have the “highs” and the “lows” identified, you will be in a better position to consider your vocational options.

Identify What You Are Good At

If you know what you are naturally good at and understand your capacity to learn and grow, you can position yourself in a professionally fruitful environment.

We often undervalue or dismiss our own capabilities because they are second nature to us. This leads us to neglect or undersell them. However, as our talent is indivisible from “who we are,” we need it to be recognized and validated if we are to feel satisfied with what we are doing.

If you are unsure of your unique attributes, ask your colleagues for feedback. Ask them which areas of professional competence define you and what they would turn to you for if they were unable to find particular answers for themselves.

If you feel that you have potential that has not yet been turned into talent, ask for a professional development discussion with your line manager or coach.

It is important that you not be put in a position in which you are struggling to find talent that is not natural to you. It is really frustrating to keep on “failing” when a small adjustment in your role responsibilities could align your talents and skills to more successful outcomes.

Find a Good Fit

The context in which you express your aspirations and talent is the third “leg of the stool.” It is the environment in which everything comes together and in which you receive reward and recognition for doing a good job.

The organizational culture, comprised of its purpose, values, and approach, must dovetail with your personality if it is to provide you with the satisfaction you seek from your work. Not only is this true for the organization as a whole, but also for the department or team you belong to, and the relationship you have with your boss. Finding a “good fit” on all these levels is extremely rewarding and energizing, particularly on the levels that impact you most directly such as your team and your boss. If the values and beliefs expressed by those in close proximity to you are not aligned to your own, and if you are not respected for your views, you are likely to feel demoralized and dissatisfied.

Try to find an organizational or departmental culture that feels comfortable to you. Be thoughtful about where you are prepared to compromise your values and beliefs and where you are not. We often try to override our sense of right and wrong for the sake of an entry on our résumé, but if we put ourselves into a values conflict, we will not be satisfied and, as a result, will not perform effectively.

What to Avoid

Often people feel unable to change their circumstances when they are dissatisfied with their work. However, in the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, “Nobody can make you feel inferior without your permission.” So be proactive: take steps to initiate changes according to your needs. Build a case for a change in your role responsibilities so that your talent, skills, and experience are put to good use. Take control of the situation and ensure that you do what you can to create a satisfying role for yourself.

You Fail to Make Yourself Visible

Being “good” and not complaining in case it makes matters worse is a common strategy. But this just perpetuates an unsatisfactory situation. If you change your expectations, attitude, and behavior, you will become more visible and people will engage with you more readily. You might like to add to your

impact by making some suggestions that will add value to the business. Raise your head above the parapet and get yourself noticed!

You Lose Your Passion

If you have been working in the same field for a number of years, you may have lost your passion for the work you do. Perhaps you would like a refresher course to bring you up to date and to inspire you again. This would also extend your network so that you can access news about what is going on in your profession, industry, or in different organizations. There is nothing like connecting with your early interests again to recapture your attention and become revitalized.

You Fail to Heed the Warning Signs

Compartmentalizing our work and telling ourselves that a dissatisfying job does not matter if the rest of our lives are lively and exciting is merely a short term rationalization. In the end, the toll of being dissatisfied will be felt, and you will become exhausted. Take heed of the warning signs before things become intolerable. There are lots of things you can do in parallel to your work to prepare yourself for the next and more rewarding step in your career.

Where to Learn More

Books:

Branham, Leigh, *The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave: How to Recognize the Subtle Signs and Act Before Its Too Late*. AMACOM, 2005.

Branham, Leigh, *Keeping the People Who Keep You in Business: 24 Ways to Hang on to Your Most Valuable Talent*. AMACOM, 2000.

Berger, Lance A., and Dorothy R. Berger, *The Talent Management Handbook: Creating Organizational Excellence by Identifying, Developing and Positioning Your Best People*. McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 2003.

Whyte, David, *Crossing the Unknown Sea*. Riverhead Books, April 2002.

Web Sites:

EzineArticles.com:

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Increasing-Job-Satisfaction—3-Steps-to-a-Happier-Work-Life&id=475037>

Free Management Library: www.managementhelp.org/prsn_wll/job_stfy.htm

humanlinks.com: www.humanlinks.com

QuintCareers.Com: www.quintcareers.com/job_satisfaction_quiz.html

Copyright © 2007 CNET Networks, Inc. All Rights Reserved.