

Americans' job dissatisfaction grows

If a 2007 survey on worker satisfaction is any indication, Americans' dissatisfaction with their jobs is at its highest in 20 years. According to market information firm The Conference Board, fewer than half of all respondents were satisfied with their jobs.

It's a fact that is probably none too surprising. What's more, just who is the most dissatisfied is even less surprising. More than 61 percent of workers under the age of 25 were not happy with their jobs, a fact that's likely due to career uncertainty or the entry level (i.e., boring) status many such workers likely hold. Where the survey might have proven most surprising was the apparent dissatisfaction workers age 45 to 54 seem to have with their jobs. Less than 45 percent of workers in that category were satisfied with their jobs, a somewhat startling result when considering the assumption many people find something they'd enjoy doing for a living by the time they reach their 40s.

However, as the survey indicates, finding

that elusive dream job, if it even exists, is no small task, regardless of a person's age. But with dissatisfaction so high across the board, how can one know when to leave their current job and pursue what's perceived to be greener pastures? If you're thinking of a career change, consider the following tips before casting out your net.

- Decide if it's your career or your job you don't like. There's a difference between dissatisfaction with your career and dissatisfaction with your job. If you like the work you do, but you feel restricted at work, don't like your coworkers, or feel there's no room for advancement, that doesn't mean you need a career change. That's more indicative of someone who needs to change jobs. You can, and probably will, be happy if you stay in the field, but you likely just need a change of scenery.

On the other hand, if the work itself is dissatisfying or unchallenging, then it might be time to consider a new career. If you don't ever see

yourself being fulfilled or happy in your current field, then a career change is best for you.

- Understand your talents and strengths. What you're good at should guide you into your next career. If you're a successful businessman but have always wanted to be a commercial fisherman, it's best if you're actually good at catching fish. The same goes with any career change. Simply dropping your current career and heading into professional parts unknown is setting yourself up for failure. Ask yourself what your strengths are and where your talents lie. A successful career will be built on your strengths, so when choosing a new career look for one where those strengths are applicable.

- Try and make the transition a smooth one. Making a career change is not going to be one big bed of roses. If it were, all those 45- to 54-year-old dissatisfied workers would have switched careers years ago most likely. To make the road a little easier, emphasize your skills that transfer beyond your current career and into

other fields. A great example is anyone with management experience. Effective management is needed in every business, from Fortune 500 companies to baseball teams to pizza parlors. So if you have management experience, emphasize that experience as you search for new employment. Prospective employers will be far more likely to hire you into a new field if they know you're bringing transferable skills that can apply to their company.

- Know what you're getting into. Some fields require advanced degrees, while others require certification. When choosing a new career, understand what it takes to be successful in the fields you're interested in. Success often breeds satisfaction. But if you ignore or are unaware of certain requirements, that can greatly reduce your chances of being successful, which could land you right back where you are now, dissatisfied and looking for answers.

Dealing with a bad boss can be tricky

Bad bosses are usually characterized as larger-than-life tyrants or fools. Just look at Mr. Burns from "The Simpsons," the pointy-headed boss from the comic strip "Dilbert," or the head honcho from the cult classic flick "The Office."

But it's no fun when these characters mimic your own office life. A boss who belittles or screams at you or lacks communication skills can cause stress, illness and sleepless nights, and prevent you from enjoying your job.

A boss may be a monster for different reasons. Maybe he is insecure about his job status in this era of restructuring and downsizing. Perhaps he's having trouble at home or with personal finances. Or it could be that he's just not a nice person.

The cause of the behavior isn't your problem. What is your problem is how you handle it. Here are some ideas to help you take control of the

situation so you can make your life more pleasant and your workday more bearable.

Problem: "My boss often gives me feedback -- but it's all negative."

Solution: Don't just accept the negativity: Ask for an appointment to discuss how you can improve your job performance. At the meeting, act like a professional, accepting his views without being defensive.

Each time you get a new assignment, think about how you will approach it and confirm it with your boss.

Problem: "My boss screams at me in front of others."

Solution: If your boss treats you like a 3-year-old, don't "egg" him on. The best response is, "Thank you. I understand." If he screams at you in the middle of a packed-house meeting about not making a deadline, keep your voice and delivery low. That way, he will feel like a

child and you will come off as the adult. If this strategy doesn't work, set up an appointment with your boss. Ask him if he can speak to you about certain matters privately instead of publicly. Document descriptions of these meetings. That way, you can have a paper trail if you need to take your complaint to your boss' boss or human resources.

Problem: "My boss is completely unrealistic with his expectations."

Solution: Make a list of your workload one week. List what you are doing and how long it takes to get it done. Then take this list to your boss and ask for suggestions on how you can get it all done on time. You may get more recognition for your efforts or even a raise once your boss understands how much you're doing.

Problem: "My boss has no idea what he is doing in his role."

Solution: Since your boss isn't on top of

things, stay on top of your boss. Ask him if there's anything else you can be doing on the job. Give an in-person or e-mail summary of what you've gotten done every few days or after you've finished a major project.

While there's not much else you can do, at least you can try to do things his way.

If these tactics don't work or you feel your boss' behavior is unacceptable, don't just sit there. Report your boss' antics to his supervisor or to someone in human resources.

If you don't want to be a troublemaker or whiner, ask for a transfer or see if you can make an internal move to another department.

If you can't do that, consider searching for a new job. Try not to quit before you find a new one.

But if the situation is ruining your life, you might need to leave. A job shouldn't be detrimental to your health or your sanity.



Front row: Lynn Ward; back row: Donna Mulford, Ruby Pflieger

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Pictured from left to right: Nicole Foss and Kara Miller