

Human Resource Associates

Employment Consultants

How to Keep Your Job, Get Along With Your Boss, and Stop Being Miserable at Work

In a recent *Personnel Notebook* entitled, "[Employee's Survival Guide for Tough Times](#)," we provided some guidelines for keeping the job you have. We received many requests to expand on this subject, not only as it relates to tough times, but also with regards to navigating the world of work on a daily basis.

Further research on this subject produced valuable insights from a number of respected sources, including Susan M. Heathfield, noted columnist and HR consultant; John Baldoni, author, national speaker, and leadership consultant; and Jack Welch, former head of GE and a staunch supporter of HR.

When I was a young apprentice, my journeyman often expressed the following sentiment:

The worst I could wish on my worst enemy is that when he gets up in the morning, he just can't stand the thought of going in to that job one more day. And the best I could wish for my best friend Billy is that when he gets up in the morning, he just can't wait to get in here to work one more day with me.

And that really was just how it was. But, not everyone is so lucky.

Hating your job is the centerpiece for a miserable life. Don't go there!

I. Stop Being Miserable at Work

Don't participate in conversations that are always about finding fault with the company, the management, the customers, coworkers, and the like, and don't hang out with the people that do. Legitimate concerns can be addressed privately, but if you wallow in misery and unhappiness, and listen to unhappy, difficult people, it cannot help but bring you down and keep you down. Unhappiness and criticism are contagious. Move on to avoid catching the bug.

Create your positive attitude. There is a wealth of literature out there that says positive attitudes and mental visualization work. Consider this:

- What's on your mind is what's on your face. It tells others who you are and attracts like-minded people. You

will not attract the opposite of what is on your mind and face.

- What's on your mind creates the filter through which you see the world. It relates to and interacts with what it recognizes, to what is familiar. It focuses on and reacts to those things that correspond to what is on your mind. The negative mind will not see the positive things that may also be around you.
- What's on your mind creates the environment in which you exist. If, like a house you live in, the environment is cluttered and unpleasant, you will not feel clean or refreshed. You will feel very much like the environment you are in.

Take responsibility for your success.

Once upon a time, the company's hierarchy made all your career choices for you. What you would be doing and how you would do it was decided fully by others. In return, you were compensated and developed. About a generation ago that changed.

Global competition meant that companies had to be much more dynamic. Changes came fast and were constant. Downsizing became part of our work lives, and smart employees realized that they could not depend on others to be responsible for their lives. They had to develop their own skills.

Whether you work for a small company or a large one, you are responsible for your career development. Insist on it.

Start by taking ownership of your job. *You* must know what *you* need to do your job well. If your boss is not giving you feedback, ask for it. If your teammates are driving you crazy, talk to them. If you are

struggling with an impossible workload, find ways to lighten it. If proceeding as you are is inefficient, failing to address the problem may well make it even worse. Look inside yourself. Are you part of the problem? Are you doing what you can to improve the situation? Make this your responsibility. Focus on what you can do *today* to know more about your job and how to do it better.

Don't stay in a job that makes you miserable. Do you dislike the work you do on a day-to-day basis? Are you good at it? Is this what you want to be doing for the rest of your life? Are you recognized for doing what you do? Do you dislike your employer, coworkers, or customers? Do you feel trapped?

I remember a woman who had failed in every job she had had during an eight-year period. In her exit interview, we reviewed her work history. All her jobs required her to edit documents, monitor library records, research legal records, and keep archival files. I asked her why she had so much trouble performing, and she stated that she was dyslexic. So, why had she exclusively pursued jobs that required her to accurately read and evaluate text material? Her response was that was where she had gained all her experience.

If any of the issues you have with your job can be resolved, and you like being there, then your direction is clear. Fix it.

However, if, after serious soul-searching, you honestly come to the conclusion that you will never be happy doing this job or being with this company, then do yourself and your employer a favor. Recognize that this was just not a good match and it's time to get your courage up and move on. If you have to get a little better prepared, then start preparing today.

II. How to Get Along With Your Boss

Recognize that you are managing each other. The relationship you create and manage with your boss is critical to your success on the job. Whether you think so or not, *you* are in charge of that relationship, and it is a symbiotic one. Your boss has information that you need to succeed, and he cannot do his job or accomplish his goals without your help. If you don't do your work, your manager will never be the success he wants to be. And you won't progress without the information he possesses or without his perspective, experience, and support.

Bosses come in all shapes, colors, and sizes, and with different levels of skill and effectiveness. Some are just plain bad bosses while others may actually be unaware of what you need from them. So, the stories you've heard about managing your manager, "managing up," are true.

Relationships are based on trust.

Do what you say you'll do. Keep time commitments, and never blindside your manager with unfortunate surprises that you could have predicted or prevented. Keep her informed about your projects and activities in the rest of the organization.

Admit when you've made an error or when one of your staff has made a mistake. Cover-ups don't contribute to an effective relationship. They're trustbusters. Lies or efforts to mislead will only lead to more stress for you as you worry about being caught or somehow slipping up on the inconsistencies of your story. Communicate regularly to build that relationship.

Put your boss's needs at the center of your universe. Recognize that success at work is not all about you. Identify your boss's areas of weakness or greatest challenges and ask what you can do to help. What are your boss's biggest worries; how can you alleviate those concerns? Understand your boss's goals and priorities. Focus your efforts in your work to match those priorities. Think in terms of the overall success of your department and your company, not just about your narrow world at work.

Look for and focus on the best parts of your boss. Every boss has good and bad points. When you're negative about your boss, you will tend to focus on his worst traits and failings. This will not improve your relationship or your prospects for success in your organization. Instead, compliment your boss on something he does well. Make him feel valued. Isn't that what you want from him?

Understand your boss's work style.

Who your boss is and how she works is her proven and reinforced method for success. She is unlikely to change. Make your work compatible with that style. Does she like frequent communication, employees who work on their own, written communications, or informal conversation when passing in the hallway?

Her preferences are important, and the better you understand them the better you will work with her.

Learn from your boss. Even if it doesn't always seem like it, your boss has much to teach you. Appreciate the fact that aspects of her work, actions, skills, and/or management style prompted your organization to choose her for the

position. So ask questions and listen more than you speak to develop an effective working relationship with her.

Learn to read your boss's moods and reactions. If he is preoccupied with this month's numbers, it might not be the right time to share your idea for a six-month improvement plan. There will certainly be times when you don't want to be bringing up new ideas. Pay attention. It will not be difficult to recognize patterns of preferences as well as of annoyances.

Ask for feedback. Let the boss play the role of coach and mentor. He can't read your mind. Enable him to offer you recognition for your performance. Make sure he knows what you have accomplished. Create an opportunity and a space in your conversation for him to tell you when you do a good job.

Value your boss's time. Try to schedule, at least a weekly meeting wherein you are prepared with a list of your needs and questions. This allows your boss time to accomplish the work without regular interruption.

Disagree but don't be disagreeable. Don't hold grudges. Don't make threats about leaving. Disagreement is fine; don't be afraid of it. But discord is not. Get over it. You are unlikely to always get your way. You will not always win.

III. Keeping the Job You Have

If you find that you can be happy at work and can get along pretty well with your boss, then you may have also decided that you want to keep your job. Let's go in that direction.

Read your job description. Is it accurate? Does it need updating? Do you understand it? What is the end result of what you're supposed to be accomplishing? Which accountabilities are of most importance to your manager? Although they all are important, they can be ranked. Look closely at your last performance reviews. Are there any messages there? How do you compare to coworkers? Are you doing the job you were hired for?

Communicate your value. Don't brag. Meet with your boss and walk through your priorities over the next six months. Doing so will let her know that you're dedicated and action-oriented.

Communicate other's value. Send a note to your boss praising an employee's work on a recent project. It shows you're a team player and an effective mentor who's got the company's interest at heart.

Help the company tighten its belt. You're on the job every day. What can you see that could make things more efficient, more productive, or more profitable? If an expert were to be called in, could he find ways to improve on what you do? *You're* the expert on what you do.

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