

Unhappy at Work?

Ask Yourself These 7 Questions

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If you notice that your complaints about work are becoming frequent and serious enough that you're questioning your willingness to stay, here are seven essential questions to ask before deciding whether to leave your position. Answering these questions is the first step in taking charge of your own career.

1. What do you enjoy and what don't you enjoy about your job?

This is a basic yet essential exercise. On a sheet of paper create two columns. In the first list all of the aspects about your job that you enjoy. In the second, detail your complaints. Be honest and specific. Now compare the two lists and notice any patterns. How meaningful are your likes and what are the impacts of your dislikes?

2. How long have you felt the way you do?

Every organization experiences good times and rough times. Are you hating your job because it's budget time or review time? Are you in a good phase only because sales are up in the summer? Have you been complaining for two solid years? Get some perspective about your overall satisfaction level.

3. How does your job align with your strengths and your values?

People are usually happiest when they are encouraged to play to their strengths and values. Make a list of your strengths and values and consider them in light of your current job and organization. How well does your job fit you? Are you an extroverted leader in a job involving a lot of data analysis? Are you committed to a particular cause and work for an organization whose mission runs counter to your ideals?

4. What is your job costing you?

Even those of us in lucrative positions face some degree of "opportunity cost" in their lives. Others face real emotional suffering. How mild or severe is the cost of remaining in your current position? Be honest about the impact your job has on your health and sense of well-being.

5. Will this job get you where you want to go?

You need to have a clear vision before making a dramatic decision about your current position. What would you love to be doing one, five and 10 years from now? How will this job get you there? Is this job a natural stepping stone or a dead end?

6. How is your boss supporting you?

Your boss's skill as a manager is a critical factor to your job satisfaction and success. She can give you challenging assignments and assist your career progression. Or she can ignore you, dump unappealing projects on you or undermine you. If your boss is intolerable, it may be time to move on. Fighting to have your boss removed or waiting for your boss to change or get fired are rarely successful tactics.

7. What's keeping you where you are?

Now it's time to be brutally honest. What are your primary motivating factors for working in this position? Perhaps you've made lifestyle choices that depend on your salary level. Maybe you spent many years and thousands of dollars obtaining an advanced degree to get where you are. Maybe you have convinced yourself that there is no better job out there. What are you committed to in your life? How does your job support those commitments?

Take some time to analyze your work experience in light of your answers to these seven questions. By noticing your desires and honoring your aspirations, you can achieve more clarity about what you want and what is in your way. With clarity, you can transform your vision into a plan for action.