

If you can't have the job you love, love the job you have

9 ways to tell whether you need a career change or an attitude adjustment
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Often, when people are feeling unsatisfied in their careers, they automatically think the solution is to look for another job or make a career change.

But, as the saying goes, "everywhere you go, there you are." Instead of a new job, what you might really need is an attitude adjustment, career experts say.

"If you're jumping from job to job for the same reasons -- they don't appreciate you, the boss is mean, no one ever listens to you, etc. -- then guess what? The problem isn't the job, it's most likely your attitude," says Noelle Nelson, who has a doctorate in [clinical psychology](#) and is the author of "The Power of Appreciation in Business."

At the same time, there are instances when the need for a job change is warranted -- the tough part is deciding which decision is right for you.

"Figuring out the reason for dissatisfaction regarding a job takes serious introspection," says Melissa Cooley, a career [consultant](#) and author of the blog "The Job Quest." "It's definitely worthwhile to take the time to sort through it; after all, no one wants to leave a hated job for another one, only to find themselves in the same situation six months later."

To help you determine whether you need to actually change jobs, careers or simply the way you think about your current position, experts offer the following tactics.

1. Find a volunteer position that does similar work. Doing so will help you figure out whether it's just your job that you dislike or your actual line of work.

"Whatever your field, [sign up for] a volunteer activity that will draw on the skills from your day job and keep at it for a good four to six months," Cooley says. "If, as time goes on, you still feel excited about your work, perhaps you should start looking for positions with other companies. On the other hand, if the same feelings you are having about your job are starting to surface in

your volunteer work that may indicate that it's the type of work you are doing that is the issue."

2. Figure out how you got to where you are. Take some time to think about the decisions you have made and steps you have taken to get to the current point in your career. Were those decisions made on your own terms? Did you take your current job just to have a job, or because it was a good fit for your skills and preferences?

Yosh Beier, [managing partner](#) at [Brooklyn](#)-based leadership coaching firm Collaborative Coaching LLC, says that it's especially important to figure out what brought you to your current job. "[In our coaching practice], we look at whether coachees can -- despite the discomfort or frustration with their present situation -- still connect with whatever brought them to their job; purpose, reputation of organization for résumé building, learning opportunity, etc.," Beier says. "If it's not possible [for people] to see the current situation as a means to an end, then that's a serious warning sign that action may be required."

On the other hand, he says, "if there is still some connection, [then] explore latitude in the current situation. What are the sources of frustration? The immediate manager, project, team culture? Sometimes it takes surprisingly little change to find new excitement."

3. Change what bothers you. Once you pinpoint what bothers you about your current job, try changing it.

Often, altering what's irking you at work will force you to have uncomfortable, but necessary conversations with your boss or co-workers, Beier says. Although difficult, doing so "can make a huge difference to say, stay in the same job but to have an extra day when you can work from home. Not everyone feels comfortable having these conversations."

4. Write about it. "Merely thinking about how you feel can lead to more confusion," Cooley says. "Writing down specifically what you like and what you hate about your work makes it more concrete."

Organizing your thoughts into a pros and cons list can also help, she says. "By taking what you think about your job and holding it up to your thoughts on leaving that job, you can easily see what matters most to you and which decision (staying or going) will allow you to be in better alignment with your priorities."

5. Put more effort in. Nelson offers another suggestion for pen-to-paper problem solving that will provide clues about your attitude toward your job.

"Take a piece of paper and draw a line down the center. On one side, write down what you think are the attributes necessary to do a great job at what you do," she says. "On the other side, list how you're actually doing -- be honest, grade yourself. Do you contribute in meetings, focus solely on your job while at work and always look for ways to advance the company's goals? Or, are you a complainer, defensive, ready to pass the buck and responsibility when something doesn't go smoothly?"

If you find that you have room for improvement in the way you approach your job, taking more ownership of your duties can help you feel more satisfied with you work. Plus, putting in a good effort may change the way your boss and co-workers respond to you, and may open doors for opportunities within the company. However, if you find that you give your job your all on a daily basis and still can't stand it, it may be time for a change.

6. Sleep on it. If the decision about whether to stay or go isn't immediately clear to you, wait.

"While you can't get a 100 percent guarantee that staying or going will make you happier, acting rashly will increase the odds that you will regret the decision you made. Plus, a night or two (or 30) of good sleep can do wonders for clearing the mind. This is your career we're talking about, so the choices you make in it deserve some consideration," Cooley says.

7. Shift your focus. Concentrate on what you do like about your job, Nelson says. "It may be a particular part of your job that is most satisfying; it could be your co-workers, the building you work in, the hours, the pay. There are negatives in every job we do. Don't dwell on them," she says.

8. Focus on growth. Regardless of whether you decide to stay or leave, be sure that your decision is one that will allow you to grow in your career. Rashly deciding to leave your job and jump to a new one just because it's new may provide you with change, but it won't necessarily provide growth. At the same time, if you figure out you're stuck in a dead-end job, don't let fear prevent you from moving on.

"Always look ahead at where you want to be and what it takes to get there -- whether within the company or outside the company," Nelson says. "Grow yourself -- professionally and personally -- so you can take advantages of opportunities when they come along."

9. Evaluate the impact your job is having on your self-confidence. Sometimes, you may be in the right career path but the wrong job. If you've loved all the jobs you've previously held in your field, and have tried to make the best out of a less-than-stellar situation in your current one to no avail, it's probably time for a job change.

One definitive sign? If your job is taking a toll on your self-worth, or making you question your ability in or affinity for a career you previously loved, then it's probably time to go. "If staying in the present situation starts to gnaw away at people's professional or personal self confidence, then that's a very serious warning sign [that it's time to change jobs]," Beier says.

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