



# *FROM STRESSED OUT TO*

# Stress Solutions

## Recognizing & Resolving Job Stress

- ✓ Most / Least Stressful Jobs of 2012
- ✓ Five Signs of Job Burnout
- ✓ The Truth About Workaholics
- ✓ Dangers of Ignoring Stress
- ✓ Hard Worker or Workaholic
- ✓ Know Your Career Mission
- ✓ 10 Ways to Reduce Career Stress
- ✓ Take a Vacation at The Office

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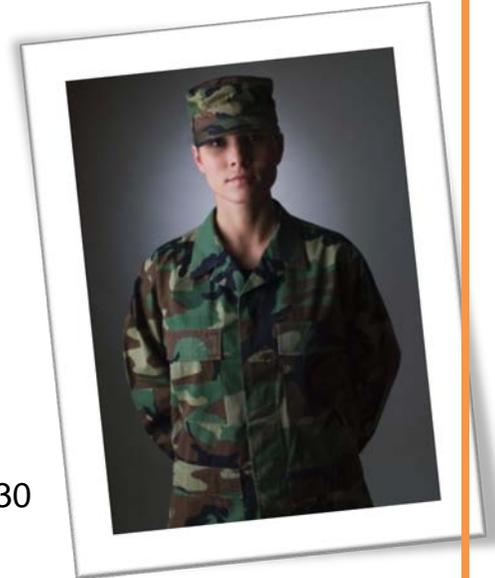
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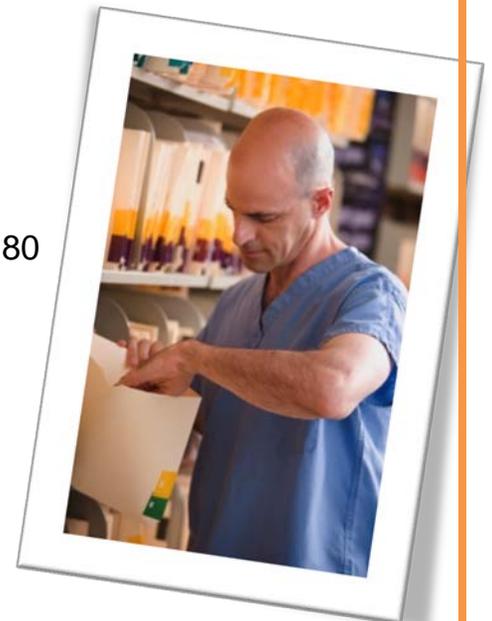
## CareerCast.com's [10 Most Stressful Jobs of 2012](#)

1. **Enlisted Military Soldier** – Avg. Income \$35,580
2. **Firefighter** – Avg. Income \$45,250
3. **Airline Pilot** – Avg. Income \$103,210
4. **Military General** – Avg. Income \$196,300
5. **Police Officer** – Avg. Income \$53,540
6. [Event Coordinator](#) – Avg. Income \$45,260
7. [Public Relations Exec.](#) – Avg. Income \$91,810
8. **Corporate Executive (Senior)** – Avg. Income \$165,830
9. [Photojournalist](#) – Avg. Income \$40,000
10. **Taxi Driver** – Avg. Income \$22,440



## CareerCast.com's [10 Least Stressful Jobs of 2012](#)

1. [Medical Records Technician](#) - Avg. Income \$32,350
2. **Jeweler** – Avg. Income \$35,170
3. **Hair Stylist** – Avg. Income \$22,760
4. **Dressmaker/Tailor** – Avg. Income \$26,560
5. [Medical Laboratory Technician](#) – Avg. Income \$36,280
6. [Audiologist](#) – Avg. Income \$66,660
7. **Precision Assembler** – Avg. Income \$31,250
8. **Dietitian** – Avg. Income \$53,250
9. **Furniture Upholsterer** – Avg. Income \$29,960
10. **Electrical Technician** – Avg. Income \$56,040



# Dealing With Job Stress During Uncertain Economic Times

By Dr. Morley Glicken



In the current economy, companies are often expected to turn on a dime in [response to changing market needs in order to stay vibrant](#). What that means is that many companies are constantly reorganizing-not just every year but sometimes as frequently as every 6 months. Employees live in a constant state of change including new processes, new procedures, new bosses, and new organizational structures. Employees are measured on goals that were typically set before the changing economy and then never modified.

As a result, there is very little loyalty to employees, many of whom may have been valued in the past. The new emphasis in the workplace is on “what have you done for me lately?” This changing dynamic in the workplace has led to ever increasingly rates of stress, [low worker satisfaction](#), poor morale, and ultimately, burnout.

Linda Barrington, managing director of human capital at the Conference Board, who helped write a 2011 report on job satisfaction, says that even workers who were lucky enough to get jobs during the current economic downturn are becoming more dissatisfied with their jobs. The report she helped write found that

only 45% of Americans are satisfied with their work. [Job satisfaction rates](#) had been steadily going upward before 2008 but took a sharp downturn after the recession hit.

## “Only 45% of Americans are satisfied with their work”

Workers entering new positions in a time of limited employment opportunities are often [so happy just to get a job](#) that they either ignore or [fail to realistically look at the demands of the job](#). Consider Jane Greer, an older worker involved in developing marketing and public relations strategies for a firm in St Louis that provided her no job protection and hired her on a temporary basis. She said that:

- Because of the incredible stress in my job to develop PR copy under extreme deadlines, sometimes less than an hour, I suffered a mild but scary stroke.
- I thought as a new older worker who had lost a long time job in journalism because of the economy, that I was lucky to get the job and really didn't ask many questions.
- I was hired quickly, started work with no training, and was thrown into the job with no one to teach me what was expected. The expectations kept changing, the hours were grueling, and pretty soon I just felt very burned out.
- I've been out of work for 4 months. I'm well enough to go back to work. They keep saying they'll hire me back, but I'm doubtful. You can imagine how poor my job prospects are given my age and my health.

### What should Jane have done before taking the job?

1. She should have spoken to others on the job. While not everyone is honest, most people who are under great job stress will give you straight information.

2. Jane should have asked for and gotten [training for the job](#) and asked that it be part of her hiring letter. In the event that the training didn't materialize, she would have had a good argument that her stroke was work-related because she lacked the proper training.

3. She should have made an honest appraisal of her physical and emotional stamina for a difficult job. Jack, an older retired academic accepted a teaching position that required him to drive an hour each way to teach a late evening 3-hour class and then get up early the next morning, do the same long drive, and teach another early morning 3-hour class. He told me he felt "comatose" by late afternoon the 2nd day and was tired the following day as well. He won't do it again but a realistic appraisal of age and stamina would have told him it wasn't a good idea to accept this schedule and admits he was so enthusiastic about getting back to teaching that it limited his objectivity.

4. Like too many of us, Jane thought her previous job as a journalist was a lifetime job. She'd never experienced a recession this bad and happily lived on credit. When she took the PR and marketing job she was facing foreclosure on her beloved house and was deeply in debt. The need to be solvent financially drove the decision to take a job she was unprepared and unqualified to do.

5. Jane thought [others would help her get up to speed](#), but because of the toxic environment she worked in where people felt a certain satisfaction in the failure of others, she was actually given wrong information and learned she couldn't trust many of her co-workers.

6. It would have also been wise for Jane to keep a journal describing the work environment and the effect it was having on her. Even though her job came without any specified security there are basic workplace rules that apply when workers are being treated in ways that are determinable to their health and well being. In her case, having evidence of her treatment at work might have improved the possibility of getting her old job back with, of course, some real changes in the way she was treated.

In the past 20 years, many studies have looked at the relationship between [job stress](#) and a variety of physical ailments. Mood and sleep disturbances, upset stomachs and headaches, and disturbed relationships with family and friends are examples of stress-related problems that often result when work-related problems exist. These early signs of job stress are usually easy to recognize, but the effects of job stress on chronic diseases is more difficult to determine because chronic diseases takes a long time to develop and can be influenced by many factors other than stress.

Nonetheless, evidence is rapidly accumulating that stress plays an important role in several types of chronic health problems including cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and ulcers. Major emotional problems related to job stress include depression, anxiety, anger, violent behavior, family violence, alcoholism and drug addiction, burnout, and in very severe cases of depression, suicide.

In a 2006 article on worker burnout in [careerbuilder.com](#), Kate Lorenz provides the following signs that worker stress is beginning to move to burnout:

### **Signs You're Moving Toward Burnout**

**Sign No. 1:** Crankiness, irritability, and an inability to get along with co-workers you used to get along with just fine.

**Sign No. 2:** Coming to work late, wanting to leave early, dreading coming to work at all, watching the clock, and counting the minutes until you leave.

**Sign No. 3:** A sense of apathy and a lack of motivation. You no longer want to be challenged.

**Sign No. 4:** You're no longer interested in interacting socially with co-workers.

**Sign No. 5:** You feel exhausted much of the time, have headaches, feel tension in all of your muscles, and have trouble sleeping.

If you're out of work or newly looking for work, it's a temptation to take whatever comes up, but many people like Jane and Jack have experienced the problems related to [taking new jobs without properly evaluating the stress](#) associated with the work. Extreme pressure to perform in an economy where workers are asked to do more and more are perfect environments for stress-related problems.

Ask others, be honest about your ability to cope with stress, and if you badly need to take a less than desirable job, take the best job under the circumstances, even if it's for a short period of time, while you continue to look for something more suitable. Don't make an exhausting job a career. As too many people have discovered, the short and long term effects can be very dangerous to your health and survival.



*Dr. Morley Glicken is a faculty member in the School of Social Work at Arizona State University. Parts of this article come from his newest book: "Treating Worker Satisfaction and Job Burnout: Helping Workers Cope with Stress during Uncertain Economic Times" to be published in 2012 by Elsevier Publishers. He may be contacted at: [mglicken@msn.com](mailto:mglicken@msn.com)*

## The TRUTH About Workaholics

By Morley D. Glicken

Many people confuse hard-working people with workaholics. Workaholism means that you value work over any other activity, even when it negatively affects your health and family, as well as the quality of your work. On the other hand, there are many people who put in long hours, but still give back to their loved ones and enjoy outside activities when they have free time. These people are hard workers, *not* workaholics. There is a very serious distinction between the two.

When work becomes all consuming and joyless – that is, you go well beyond what's necessary and have no other interests or activities – it becomes a negative addiction. Workaholics work because they have nothing else to take its place. Their work addiction is a recurring obsession, and typically joyless.

These days too many people are being labeled (or labeling themselves) "workaholics" just for putting in a few extra hours per week. The truth is that in this poor economy, many of these people are working extra hard just to keep their jobs. *Real* workaholics have few (if any) outside interests. They let their family lives fall apart. They often have health problems and suffer from depression and deep insecurities.

Like any addiction, they repeat destructive behaviors despite knowing that they're destructive. Many would like to stop, but find it difficult or impossible to do so.

Workaholics should not be confused with people who are simply hard workers, love their jobs and go the extra mile to finish a project. By contrast, a workaholic is someone who constantly thinks about work, and without work feels anxious and depressed. Workaholics are difficult to get along with, because they frequently push others as hard as they push themselves.



## Here are some key differences between hard workers and workaholics:

1. Hard workers think of work as a required and (at times) pleasurable obligation. Workaholics see work as a way to distance themselves from unwanted feelings and relationships.
2. Hard workers keep work in check so they can be available to their family and friends. Workaholics believe that work is more important than anything else in their lives, including family and friends.
3. Workaholics get excitement from meeting impossible demands. Hard workers don't.
4. Hard workers can take breaks from work while workaholics can't. They think about work regardless of what they're doing or who they're with.

An interesting way of understanding the difference between hard workers and workaholics is found in the research of E.J. Douglas and R.L. Morris, who argue that what we typically call a workaholic, with its negative connotations, may more correctly be understood when we look at that person's motivation to work. The researchers found that people work hard for four reasons:

1. Because they want the financial rewards of hard work. Douglas and Morris call these people "material goal seekers."
2. Because they find little enjoyment from leisure activities. They can be called "low leisure" hard workers.
3. Because they love the perks they get at work, such as friendships, an easy commute, great working conditions, a good health plan, etc. They are "perkaholics" rather than workaholics.
4. Because they want to work just for work's sake. *These* people are the true workaholics.

While these are the four primary types of hard workers, there *is* also a fifth type – people who work hard simply because they love what they do. Barbara Woods is Executive Director of Casa Palmera, an organization providing psychological and medical help to men, women and their family members suffering from addictions and behavioral health disorders in San Diego. After an injury, Barbara's friends suggested she take time off to heal. Her response: "I thought about it, but I just love my job. I can't wait to get to work. I know I work long hours and people think I'm a workaholic, but I get such joy out of my work. I feel like I'm doing something important."

While it's true that Barbara works up to 80 hours a week, she's also engaged with her sons, has many friends and is happy and healthy, so she is likely not a workaholic. Barbara simply is one of those fortunate people who works hard because she truly loves her job.

## Do you find yourself pulling too many late nights and coming into work on the weekends?

**If you're concerned you may be addicted to work, test yourself to see if these six common traits of workaholics apply to you:**

1. Workaholics are intense, energetic, competitive and driven
2. Workaholics have self-doubts
3. Workaholics prefer work to leisure
4. Workaholics work anytime, anywhere
5. Workaholics make the most of their time
6. Workaholics blur the line between business and pleasure. As a consequence, it's not uncommon for workaholics to have major health problems including stress-induced illnesses, chronic fatigue and increased anxiety levels

Source: Marilyn Machlowitz, Machlowitz Consultants, Inc.

Researchers also have found that there are many people who are likely workaholics, but have few of the emotional problems associated with workaholism. The term "enthusiastic workaholics" is used to describe workaholics without health problems who learn the requirements of a job quickly, excel at their work, put great amounts of time into the job and reap the rewards for their work-related efforts.

"Non-enthusiastic" workaholics are those who do have health risks and put a great deal of time into work, but get none of the rewards in return. Many of these people work at companies that lack systems of rewarding exceptional work, or have an internal bias against certain types of workers.

If you think you're a workaholic, there are mental health specialists who can help. Look for someone with professional training, such as a licensed social worker, psychologist, counselor or psychiatrist, who specializes in work-related problems. Research suggests that a cognitive approach to counseling workaholics can be very helpful. This type of therapy focuses on thinking through negative behavior by looking at a patient's perceptions, premises and beliefs about work. Family counseling also can repair some of the damage done to relationships by workaholic behavior.

Finally, if you're using alcohol or substances to cope with the pressures of work, seek out a drug and alcohol specialist. The evidence is clear that being a workaholic leads to serious physical problems. Don't risk your life for your job! Seek help and learn to cope with the need to overwork. The key is to understand that sometimes an obsession with your job performance is *more* than normal hard work. It's a real – and dangerous – addiction.

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This article is excerpted with permission from [Retirement for Workaholics: Life after work in a Downsized Economy](#), by Morley D. Glicken, which is available from [Amazon books](#)

## 10 Habits to Help Advance Your Career

By Taunee Besson, CMF, CareerCast.com Senior Columnist

**Q:** It's easy to find articles full of [advice for job seekers](#), but what about [career advancement](#) for those who are *already* employed? Since companies have cut back staff, many employees are stuck doing the work of three people these days. How can I possibly focus on my career advancement when I'm suffering from so much [workplace stress](#)?

**A:** Seven Habits of Highly Effective People was a business best seller for an incredibly long time – especially considering its relatively simple advice. Even though most of the book's readers probably already *knew* the seven habits, putting them on paper helped to enhance their credibility.

The same is true when it comes to advice on how to [advance your career](#). A lot of the tips I can offer are common sense, but unless you remember – and actually *do* – each of them, you'll never get on the path to career success. With this in mind, here are **10 Habits to Help Advance Your Career**, which if followed will help you take your mind off everyday stress and focus on [career advancement](#):

### 1. Know your career mission and pursue it with vigor

Like Shakespeare's prose, this habit may be interpreted on more than one level. As a philosophy, it challenges you to discover the unique role best suited to your talents, interests and values and serves as a driving force to propel you toward success.



On a more pragmatic level, your career mission is represented by your job description. The happiest professionals are those who understand their work, and what it takes to do a good job. This comes from a combination of technical competence and knowing exactly what management or clients expect from them. As quality experts would say, they do the job right the *first* time.

## **2. Competence alone will not get you what you want**

You must also make sure that management notices when you do good work, and understands that you expect to be rewarded for going above and beyond. Too often employees just assume that their bosses know what's best when it comes to helping with career advancement, and that doing a really good job will automatically be acknowledged. Unfortunately, the truth is that many workers only generate attention when they're a problem.

If you really want to advance your career, you have to ask for what you want. Your manager isn't a mind reader, and waiting quietly to be recognized is a surefire way to get passed over for a promotion.

## **3. Become an "intrepeneur" – view your job as a long term consulting assignment, not a permanent gig**

Years ago, Fast Company magazine had a cover story called "Me, Inc.", which revolutionized its readers' thinking about their careers. The article said that because organizations no longer guarantee lifetime employment, it's important think of yourself as a contractor with a portfolio instead of a loyal employee. As a contractor, your focus should be doing excellent work, learning as much as possible from each position, and being ready to [hop to a new job](#) should the desire or need arise.

## **4. Take some career development risks**

Seize the responsibility for your own career advancement. Don't waste valuable time hoping for the best, or waiting for your company to notice that you're doing high-quality work and shower you with riches and promotions. Chart a [career path](#), and make your management your partners in working to advance your career.

## **5. Trust your gut**

If a situation does or doesn't feel right, don't let logic override intuition. Have you ever taken a job your gut warned you against, only to find weeks later that your first instinct had been correct?

Steve Jobs knows what the public wants and makes it available to them before they even know that they want it. If he had traveled the "path well taken," we may still be using CD players instead of iPods.

Logic has its place in the decision making process, but whole-brained thinking will give you a balanced perspective on your career advancement that pure analysis cannot.

## **6. Network, network, network – even when you don't want a new job**

A well-developed [professional network](#) can be a source of friendships, mentors, and referrals for everything from pediatricians to plumbers. Your network can also provide objective insights for evaluating opportunities and problems.

Trade organizations, churches, alumni associations, friends of friends, and continuing education classes all offer excellent sources for cultivating relationships with colleagues who can help advance your career. Remember: job security comes and goes, but a solid network of valuable contacts is valuable no matter the circumstances.

## **7. Negotiate for a win-win solution**

While it may appeal to our most primitive instincts to leave opponents bleeding in the dust, we will probably have to work with them again. Humiliation does not breed long-term relationships. It promotes a long lasting desire for revenge.

The next time you are in a mood to take no prisoners, put yourself in your adversary's place. Suggest a solution that benefits both of you. You may not get the short-term victory, but you won't be stuck with a long-term enemy, either.

## 8. Fake it until you make it

I'm not suggesting you lie on your resume or present yourself as someone you're not. "Faking it" refers instead to those occasional lapses of self confidence we experience when faced with a challenging project. Self doubt can grow in you like a cancer: "Can I really pull this off?" "Am I good enough to do this job?"

If you find yourself suffering from a crisis of confidence, remember that positive behavior can easily overtake negativity and pull you out of your rut. And your *behavior* is what others see, not what you're feeling on the inside. Have to give a presentation and scared that you don't know what you're doing? Use your nerves as an extra source of energy so you seem even more engaging.

Fear and stress can be your allies if you channel them effectively.

## 9. Only pursue goals that you actually want to achieve

How often have you heard people say "I plan to lose 25 pounds this year," but come December their weight hasn't changed? Goals prefaced by "I should" rather than "I want" are generally doomed to failure.

When you begin to set goals to help advance your career, try testing their viability using the RUMBA method: Each goal should be Reasonable, Understandable, Measurable, Behavioral and Agreed upon. Meeting only the first four conditions isn't enough. You and everyone involved with your goal must genuinely agree it's a *great* idea, or a lack of enthusiasm will cause it to die sooner or later.

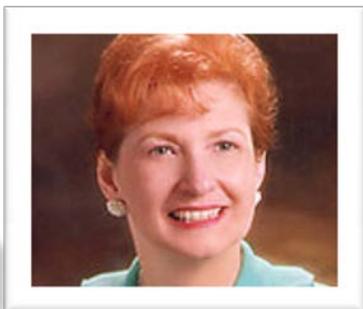
## 10. Fill your life with a combination of work, education and fun

According to Richard Bolles' book *Three Boxes of Life*, Americans tend to divide their lives into three discreet time periods, each having a singular purpose. From birth to about 21, we are in our learning box. Our mission is to absorb information and advice from our elders. From about 21 to 65, we are in our working box where we must concentrate on producing worthwhile products and services. Then at 65, we retire and move into our fun box.

Unfortunately, people who buy into this pattern for living lead a pretty stale existence and often die early because they feel useless without their jobs. They've forgotten how to learn and enjoy themselves. For them life without work is meaningless. Many Baby Boomers are facing this dilemma as they struggle to decide if they want or can afford to quit working.

## “Carpe Diem!”

Those who have mastered the art of combining education, career, and leisure throughout their lives follow the sage advice of Robin Williams in *The Dead Poets Society*: Carpe Diem! They seize each day and make it their own.



*Senior Columnist Taunee Besson, CMF, is president of Career Dimensions, Inc., a consulting firm founded in 1979 that works with individual and corporate clients in career transition, job search, executive coaching, talent management and small business issues. She is an award-winning columnist for CareerJournal.com and a best-selling author of the Wall Street Journal's books on resumes and cover letters. Her articles on a variety of career issues have appeared on numerous career/job websites and trade and business journals. Ms. Besson has been quoted numerous times in The Wall Street Journal, The Dallas Morning News, Business Week, Time, Smart Money, and a number of other websites and publications.*

# Are You Suffering from “Comfortable Misery?”

By Taunee Besson, CMF, CareerCast.com Senior Columnist

**Question:** I’m a highly paid executive who’s good at my job, but I hate it. Every Sunday my stomach ties in knots and [I dread the thought of going to work in the morning](#). If my compensation package and the job prestige weren’t so high, [I would leave in a minute](#). Unfortunately, my golden handcuffs are firmly secure. If I’m so good at what I do, why am I so unhappy?

**Answer:** How many of these statements apply to you?

- I’m counting the months/years until I retire.
- I hate my job, but love the income.
- My job situation is bound to get better if I just keep hanging in there.
- I may not like my current career, but I know I’m good at it.
- I’m constantly worried about my position being eliminated.
- I’ve lost interest in my work, but I enjoy the camaraderie of the people.
- My associates know the caliber of my work. I don’t have to keep proving myself.
- The chances of my finding a job I will truly enjoy are slim and none.
- When friends talk about their new careers, I wish I had the courage to make a change as well.
- Changing careers is much more risky than staying where I am.
- I doubt I can find an equivalent position at another company.
- I would rather swim with sharks than start a job search.
- I tend to focus on the negatives of a career change, rather than contemplating the positives of its potential.
- My family and friends think I’m in the catbird’s seat. They tell me I’d be crazy to make a change.
- Work isn’t meant to be satisfying. That’s why it’s called work.

If you checked just one of the above statements, maybe you’re just having a bad day. If you checked two or more you’re probably suffering from a self-inflicted malady called “Comfortable Misery”, a career syndrome characterized by inertial thinking and an overwhelming need to maintain the status quo.

Those suffering from Comfortable Misery run efficiently on autopilot. They go through the motions of completing their projects and emptying their in-baskets, while experiencing little joy, learning, or feeling of genuine satisfaction. They’re like zombies in business suits.



[Why do these talented professionals cling to the jobs they hate?](#) There are lots of reasons:

- The U.S.A. was founded by individuals who believed in the Puritan work ethic -- we were put on this earth to atone for our sins, not have a good time. Americans continue to take this mindset to heart. Therefore, millions of workers define their work as a means of providing for their families and practicing productivity. They live to work, not work to live. The thought of enjoying their careers produces more guilt than pleasure.
- Along with the Puritan work ethic, Baby Boomers' parents have imbued their children with the "Depression Mentality":
- "Never forget, you are lucky to have any job, let alone one you enjoy.  
"Your work puts food on the table and a roof over your head."  
"You labor to support yourself."  
"Personal satisfaction is for dilettantes."
- Many very talented professionals [question their marketability](#). Often they've been employed by one company for a number of years and find it difficult to believe anyone else will hire them. Also, because they've never built a network of colleagues outside their firm, they have no understanding of how their skills and experience can transfer to the world beyond company X.
- Confirmed optimists and pessimists tend to embrace the status quo. Optimists are sure things will get better, if they stick around long enough. With relieved resignation, they put the responsibility for their careers in the hands of fate or their corporate leadership. Pessimists assume there are no truly satisfying positions anywhere, so why expend the effort looking for one. Isn't it ironic how two opposing attitudes both lead to the same paralyzing conclusion!
- Golden handcuffs account for a lot of Comfortable Misery. A prestigious company, attractive compensation package, big title and the promise of more to come keep people from leaving jobs they hate. The thought of giving up an accustomed lifestyle can tether an unhappy executive to his corner office, when he longs to catch the green wave at the helm of a bare-bones start-up.
- "The Black Hole Syndrome" also keeps millions of unhappy professionals mired in unsatisfying careers. When a person is frustrated and unmotivated by a position that provides no opportunity to learn or make a contribution, doing his job can suck all the energy out of him. When just showing up at work each day is such a tremendous effort, he can't imagine looking for another job simultaneously. His situational depression also has a devastating effect on his self-esteem. Like the clinically depressed, people experiencing the Black Hole Syndrome can think they don't deserve to escape their current situation.
- Feedback from those we love and trust often causes us to rely on the status quo instead of pursuing something better. It's very common for people to stay in jobs they hate because their friends and family keep saying, "You're so good at what you do. Why would you ever want to change?"
- A comfortable work environment that doesn't expect too much, appreciates your work and surrounds you with friendly colleagues can be a very enticing place, even when the job leaves much to be desired. For those having motivational difficulties, it's a great spot to veg.
- How many job seekers do you know who enjoy the process of finding another position? Probably not many. Lots of professionals stay where they are because they can't face the prospect of looking for a new opportunity. A [job search](#) is hard work, often full of rejection. Unless a merger or downsizing forces them into it, a number of dissatisfied careerists will sacrifice long-term gain to avoid short-term pain.

If any of the above reasons resonate with you, you are suffering from a bonafide Comfortable Misery. This is a treatable syndrome, but only you have the power to cure yourself.

Senior Columnist Taunee Besson, CMF, is president of Career Dimensions, Inc., a consulting firm founded in 1979 that works with individual and corporate clients in career transition, job search, executive coaching, talent management and small business issues. She is an award-winning columnist for CareerJournal.com and a best-selling author of the Wall Street Journal's books on resumes and cover letters.

# 11 Ways to Vacation at the Office

By Victoria Brienza

It's that time of year again, when it seems like everyone in the office is on vacation except you. You'd love to be off on a tropical island, sipping a fruity drink with an umbrella while soaking in the sun. But instead, you're working on an endless project and that proverbial vacation light at the end of the tunnel is about as clear as the Milky Way on a cloudy night.

If you're like most people, you [don't use three full vacation days each year](#) that you deserve, according to a survey by Expedia.com. So why is it that those elusive vacation days we work so hard for all year are being ignored? Reasons vary, but many people fear the repercussions at work if they take off, or they'd rather cash in their time off. And for those who do get away, nearly 24% admit that [they check their work e-mail and voicemail while on vacation](#).



Taking time out for ourselves, our families and our sanity is an important part of life. These mental breaks help our brains re-energize, help us to feel renewed and, in the end, be more productive. Whether you can physically get away on vacation or just find ways each day to make time for you, it's important to [your health and well-being](#).

No worries, though! If you're stuck in the office during this vacation season or just need to find ways to better balance work and life, here are 11 tips to help you work like you're on vacation:

## Set the Timer



Set times that you check e-mail and respond: Do you ever feel like you're always getting interrupted by e-mails, instant messages and meetings? Like the only time you can get the actual work done is before work, during lunch or after everyone else has headed home for the day. Well, you're not alone!

According to a workplace study from the University of California, Irvine, the average amount of time people spend on any single event before being interrupted or before switching activities was about three minutes. That's 160 interruptions or changes of course every eight-hour workday. No wonder productivity seems so elusive some days.

### **Solution:**

By responding to e-mails right after they arrive, you check e-mail throughout the day, then you can create space for yourself to get work accomplished, and later have focused time where you can give your full attention to your e-mails. The same goes for instant messages. If you need quiet time, put your "away" message up. The e-mails and instant messages will still be there in an hour or two. And if a co-worker really needs to get your attention, they can pick up the phone or walk by your desk for the answer. Another trick is to schedule meetings with yourself in your calendar. These are dedicated times for you to get your work done and be and feel productive.

# Hop on the Musical Time-Machine



During your work day, listen to music from your favorite vacation spot or memory: It's amazing how a few notes from a song can transport you to another space and time. Music has this incredible ability to conjure up memories of happy times gone by. So why don't you make the most of the phenomenon and bring it into your workday?

## **Solution:**

Take some time to create a music playlist or CD of your favorite tunes to play as you work. Each day you could play music from a different country you visited or from a different time period of your life (i.e., college, 80's, etc...) and give yourself some musical mental moments throughout your day.

# Take a Walk

Grab a co-worker and walk and talk about your work projects: We all know that exercise is good for our bodies, but it's easy to put it off and use work as the excuse. So why don't you combine work and exercise? By walking at least 30-minutes a day on most days of the week, you can begin to see several health benefits and get some quality work in as well. It's a low-impact, high-benefit way to reduce stress, increase your energy and get your muscles working.

## **Solution:**

Instead of sitting in your cubicle, grab a co-worker and multi-task while walking and talking about work. Or better yet, start a walking club. And you don't need to worry about bringing your gym bag to work. You can do it with what you wore to work, that is, except those ladies who had to wear their Jimmy Choo's to the office.



# Say Good-Bye to Clutter



Clean off your desk and your files to feel better organized: Chances are, if you've been at your company for awhile, the items on your desk and in your filing cabinet are expanding like most of our waistlines. We hold on to papers, objects and items for that "someday" when we might use them.

But for most of the stuff, that day never comes and we just bury ourselves in needless clutter. Take control and spring clean your space! You'll feel better and more productive (and likely be more productive) when the weight of the waste is not clogging up your cubicle.

### **Solution:**

Take an hour each month to review your files and the piles of papers on your desk. Eliminate and shred any documents for past projects that are taking up space. Get rid of any of those items that you don't use, won't use or haven't used in years. Make your mantra, "It's mind over clutter!" Freeing up the clutter will help clear your mind and set you free.

## **It's Siesta Time**

Take 20 minutes to close your eyes for a power nap: There is one tradition that did not (but should have) come to the U.S. from Europe with our forefathers: the siesta. A short power nap is a great way to help boost your memory, improve cognitive skills, increase creativity and enhance energy levels. And a benefit for the company is that it helps improve your productivity.

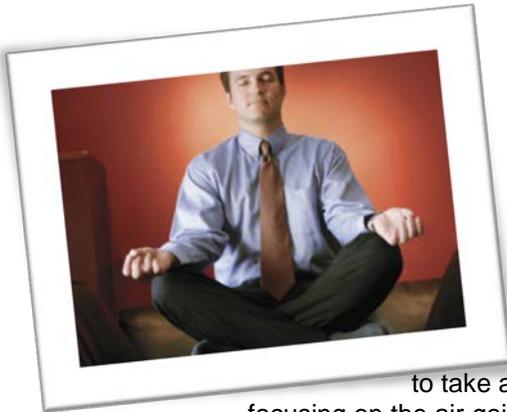
Since most Americans are averaging less than seven hours of sleep a night, a little mid-day snooze helps combat the post-lunch food coma and improves alertness. A few companies are finally realizing the importance of the siesta and providing "sleeping rooms" where employees can nap or meditate during their work day.



### **Solution:**

If you don't have an office (where you can close your door) or a quiet space to relax, then head to your car for a quick catnap. Just check your schedule to make sure that you don't have a meeting. And remember your phone so that you can set your alarm and ensure that you won't oversleep

## **Relax and Get Centered**



Take five to 10 minutes for deep breathing and relaxation: In this hurried world, it can be a challenge to take five to 10 minutes out of the day to re-focus ourselves and relax.

Taking a few moments to quiet your mind, focus on some deep breaths and re-center yourself can be highly beneficial to your mental and physical being. Being able to access your inner calm can help clear your mind, reduce stress and give you more energy to face the task at hand.

### **Solution:**

Find a quiet space (your office, an empty conference room, your car) to take a quick mental break. Lie down, if possible, and take some deep breaths, focusing on the air going in and out of your nose. If a thought pops into your head, it's okay.

Just recognize it, give yourself permission to deal with it in a few minutes and then let it go. Your purpose for these breaks is to relax and re-energize yourself.

## **Unplug Yourself**

Leave technology at the office during your lunch break: Technology helps us make connections and stay in tune with the world around us. While this instant communication has its advantages, it also has given our bosses, co-workers and clients more leeway to reach out to us outside of regular business hours.

Years ago, it was almost unheard of that employees answered work-related questions over the weekend unless it was an emergency. It might be a welcomed intrusion for the workaholic, but this continual cycle of being available has blurred the lines of work-life balance and had caused workers to feel more anxious and “always on” duty.

**Solution:**

While you’re at lunch, turn off your cell phone, your iPad, your laptop or any other battery-driven device. Take this time to slow down and eat, savoring each bite and enjoy some peace and quiet. Don’t worry! The work will still be at the office when you return.



## Network Shamelessly

Use downtime to try to catch up with old friends and colleagues: Making connections with other people is a vital part of our human nature. Just take a look at the explosion of social networks and how we are connecting to people old and new. We may not know our neighbor’s name, but we are connecting with our kindergarten crush on Facebook.



**Solution:**

Spend your downtime re-connecting with old friends or co-workers. Attend a networking event with the goal of meeting other like-minded professionals. Consider Meet-Up groups and companies like Luncheonpreneur.com, a free service that connects professionals for lunch meetings and networking.

Getting out of the office and socializing with others can be energizing and beneficial to your long-term career.

## Be One With Nature

Eat outdoors and get some vitamin D: Getting outside to enjoy fresh air and sunshine can help boost your mood and calm the nerves. Vitamin D (aka the happiness vitamin) has been proven to help lift mild depressive symptoms. While vitamins are beneficial, the sun helps the body produce vitamin D naturally.

**Solution:**

Walk to lunch or to get coffee. Sit out in the sun (with sunscreen, of course) for at least 15 to 20 minutes a day to maximize your vitamin D intake. Take some deep breaths, eat your lunch and soak in the warmth of the sun.



## Take a Mini-Spa Break

Find ways to bring the spa to your space: If you can’t make it to the spa for some special treatment time, find ways to bring that relaxing retreat to you. From aromatherapy to pedicures to yoga, all of these pampering experiences can be modified and used at work.

### **Solution:**

If you can't break out your yoga mat, then take a couple of minutes to stretch all of the muscles in your body. Start first with stretching your ankles and toes. Rotate them circularly and then switch directions. Work your way up your body to your head.

Remember, this is supposed to be relaxing, so if it's not feeling good – stop! Another spa option is to take a cup of hot water and add in a couple of drops of essential oils. Once the water and essential oils are mixed, take a couple of deep breaths to soak in the aroma. If you're daring enough, put a towel over head and make it a mini-facial.



## **Don't Skimp at Lunch**

Take the full lunchtime you're allotted. Have lunch with friends and laugh: It's a busy day and you're plugging along and then you look up at the clock and say, "Three o'clock already!! But, I haven't even had lunch yet!" Sound familiar? It should.

**"55% of workers do not take a lunch hour."**

In a recent poll, 55% of workers said that they do not take a lunch hour. And over the past few years, many workers are spending lunchtime eating at their desk to save money and to catch up on work.



### **Solution:**

Grab some co-workers or meet friends for an old-fashioned lunch at a restaurant away from the office. Make sure to not talk or think about work. By doing this, you give your brain a chance to relax and re-energize.

If you can, find things to talk about that make you laugh. A good ole belly laugh can have long lasting, healthy effects on your immune system and help protect you from the damaging effects of stress.

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