

A New Start—in Your Old Job

How to Chart a Fresh Course for a Career Without Jumping Ship

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YOU'RE STUCK. Yes, you're working harder than ever—especially since all those recent staff cutbacks. Yes, you're as ambitious as ever—and see any number of jobs you could do at the company.

But you haven't had a promotion in several years and don't see one in sight. New opportunities at other companies are equally scarce, which rules out employer-hopping.

So what do you do when you're running fast—and going nowhere? How can you rejuvenate your career when you feel trapped in the same old job?

For many employees, that is the question in today's economy. With so few companies hiring, and so many workers staying put, there just isn't a lot of movement in workplaces these days. Many who survived layoffs and took on extra work to fill job gaps are eager for new challenges. But when they ask for assignments that will expand their experience and move them up the ranks, their bosses often tell them, "Just do what you're doing now and we'll get back to you next year," says Laurence J. Stybel, co-founder of Stybel Peabody & Lincolnshire, a Boston career-management firm. "It's hard to have an intelligent discussion about career development with managers who are still stretched thin on resources and feel uncertain about what lies beyond the next quarter," Mr. Stybel adds.

So does that mean that the bored and restless are doomed to slump at their desks forever? Absolutely not. Those who understand it is up to them to drive their careers can change and grow without walking out the door.

How do they do it? Let's count some of the ways.

Broaden Your Horizons

Consider Laura Terbough, a 30-year-old manager at Intel Corp. Last spring, she felt unhappy with her job as a consumer-marketing manager, which she had held for 2½ years. "There was just a feeling that I wasn't connecting," she says.

At first she thought she would have to leave Intel to find more satisfying work. But few companies were hiring. Then her counterpart at Intel in Germany decided to take a five-month sabbatical and suggested she fill in for her, beginning in April 2003.

That opportunity turned out to be just the right remedy for her malaise.

On her return to California in August, she cast a wide job-hunting net. Because she was interested in education, she considered educational software, toy companies and universities. But she also focused on options at Intel.

In October, she learned about a possible job as program marketing manager for Intel's world-wide educational group, which would mean collaborating with educators and governments to improve students' conceptual skills by focusing on technology, math and science. She quickly arranged to meet with the group's hiring manager, with whom she had worked before, and stressed why she thought it was a perfect fit.

But what most helped her reinvigorate

To beat the blues, focus less energy on work and more on external activities.

her career, Ms. Terbough says, was her decision to fill in for her colleague in Germany. Being in a new environment with a different culture and language was exciting and boosted her self-confidence and determination to try something new.

Focus Less on Work

Another way to combat career doldrums is to focus less energy on work and more on activities outside the office.

By letting go of an all-consuming focus on their jobs, employees will not only derive more personal satisfaction, but also become more productive and effective at work, says Dory Hollander, a workplace psychologist and president of WiseWorkplaces, an Arlington, Virginia, executive-coaching firm. They will be able to bring new interests and energies to their jobs, which in turn should help them advance their careers.

A 40-year-old business unit manager at a midsize consulting company in Washington adopted that tactic about 18 months ago. "After six years at the company, I felt I couldn't develop the business into something I felt proud of, and I wasn't encountering any exciting new challenges," he says. He contemplated quitting but re-

alized he couldn't easily replace his six-figure income. So he sought career counseling from Dr. Hollander and also enrolled in acting classes.

Because he now wants more time for after-work activities, he has learned to be far better organized and productive at work. He delegates a lot of administrative work and focuses intently on partner-client relationships, where he can build business for his firm and add to the bottom line.

He also thinks he has become a better manager. He never used to spend much time talking with his staff, gauging where different people needed help or figuring out who was best at what tasks. But since he enrolled in acting classes, he says, he has become more outgoing and better able to converse with employees. The exchange has resulted in closer work relationships, better teamwork and greater motivation on his staff, he believes.

As a result, he no longer wants to land a job at another company. "I've become a happy prisoner of this job," he says.

Make Lateral Moves

Not everyone can move up, at least not right away, but it's often possible to move sideways to escape an unsatisfying job or a career rut. As special assistant to the president of Gap Inc.'s Gap Brand Global unit, Sarah Dey knew she had a plum job. She wrote speeches for her boss, facilitated meetings, conducted research and supported him through his day-to-day activities. "Getting exposed to senior executive life was phenomenal," she says.

But in early 2002, after nearly two years on the job, Ms. Dey concluded that her own career needs were getting "lost in the shuffle" of day-to-day pressures. "The spotlight was never on me, and I was just a support person," she says. "I wanted to be accountable for my own results."

Unsure of what she wanted, Ms. Dey, who is 35, took stock of her work history, which included a stint as a consultant at Boston-based Bain & Co.

Then a new job opened up—as senior manager of internal brand strategy—that was a lateral move for the same pay. But she realized it would give her more independence and a chance to emerge out of a support role. She sold herself by using all of her experience. "I convinced them that I could balance a lot of different things at once," she says. She has since moved to another job at Gap as a director of international strategy and consumer insights.

Opportunity Counts

In a survey of employees at large and small U.S. companies, advancement opportunities were among the aspects of job satisfaction rated "very important" by a majority of respondents

Job security	65%
Benefits	64%
Communication between employees and management	62%
Employee flexibility to balance life and work issues	62%
Compensation/pay	59%
Career advancement opportunities within the organization	52%

Source: Society for Human Resource Management


Go Above and Beyond

Getting ahead also usually requires taking initiative and stepping beyond the boundaries of your job. Deliver what your boss expects first—but also take on new challenges without waiting to be asked. That may include stepping in as the leader in a situation where no one is clearly in charge or bartering with someone who has been assigned to take charge of a project but doesn't have the time or interest.

James M. Citrin, an executive recruiter at Spencer Stuart and co-author of "The 5 Patterns of Extraordinary Careers," distinguishes between gaining direct permission from superiors and using implied permission, "where you are able to create the presumption that you have permission. The way to expand your implied permission is to add value and also bring other key people along for the ride," he says.

Two years ago, a 31-year-old project manager at an insurance company felt disappointed when she was excluded from a conference of more senior-level managers in her area. Rather than sulk, she floated an idea with some co-workers to form a teleconferencing network group with women managers across the company. Now, 19 women have monthly teleconferences to discuss work and management issues.

This networking has helped the project manager advance. As a result of her increased visibility and the mentoring she has received from other women in the group, she has been offered bigger assignments, including one to upgrade the company's financial systems world-wide. "The way I got it was through these discussions," she says.

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