

Stop Stagnating and Make The Change

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It's time to work on **you**. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

Are you bored? There's no shame in admitting it. At one point or another, most people are bored. The issue is that sometimes you're bored at work, and that's when things get a little trickier. The solution is not as simple as picking up a book or going for a walk when you start to feel stagnant in your career. The stress from that feeling can seep into other aspects of your life, affecting your mental health. But how do you change? How do you move out of a period of stagnation? That is what we'll figure out today.

What is stagnation exactly? It's the feeling of walking down a road to nowhere. At some point, you stopped paying attention to your surroundings and just kept walking. Suddenly, you look around, and your surroundings are unfamiliar. You are unsure of how you got so far without really knowing where you were going or following a map or a guide.

The causes of stagnation vary from person to person and situation to situation. It can happen because we feel unchallenged or unfulfilled at work, because of:

- burnout or lack of achievement
- vague career goals
- fear
- or even a negative mindset

Whatever the reason, the first step to getting your career going again is to recognise your current state. Try to identify a couple of reasons why you may have got there. Career stagnation is one thing you can't fix with a general solution. The most effective way to change is to identify what you need to address [1].

So, how do you start making the change? Examine what got you stuck in the first place. When was the last time you accomplished a goal at work? If you had one, what was your five-year plan, and where did you stop working on it? Have you been burnt out at work due to staffing or organisational changes? Make a list of everything that is causing you to feel disengaged from your work, and start the ones you can change. For example — you cannot change if your job is understaffed; however, you can set boundaries of how many new projects you will take on.

When making this list, keep in mind that you are not alone. In a 2015 survey, 32% of workers in the U.S said they were not engaged at work, and 17.2% - or 35.5 million - said they were "actively disengaged."

Once you can identify what got you into this rut, it's time to start getting yourself out of it. The best way to start it is to set a new goal. This can be a short-term goal because your focus should be to get yourself out of career stagnation and then renew your goal when you feel some momentum again. In fact, one way to avoid career stagnation in the first place is to set periodic reminders to review your goals and pivot where necessary. That provides time-based markers to ask yourself the questions we mentioned before and keep your disengagement in check.

While you are setting a clear short-term goal, you should also be taking stock of the resources and skills you have to offer a workplace. That is in part so you can go to your current job and ask for more responsibility — more on that in a moment — but it is also so that you can identify gaps in your expertise. A great way to get out of a work rut is to focus on building skills you may not have in your back pocket [2]. Many online resources provide full-length courses to help you fine-tune existing skills or learn entirely new ones. Or you may want to re-train or do a certificate program. If that is the case, make sure you check with your employer. Many workplaces provide scholarships or compensation opportunities to employees looking to learn and develop new skills.

Taking courses or using self-guided learning to develop your skills may also reveal new passions that you had not given time to in the past. It's frightening to think about because maybe it leads you away from your current position, which, while stagnant, may feel comfortable. But right now, you aren't looking for comfort; you are looking to shake things up, so don't be afraid to pursue new skills.

Next, you're going to want to start taking on more responsibilities at work and beyond. And yes, you do have to go out and ask. Schedule a meeting with a superior and show off a little bit. Share the skills you have learned and any relevant goals to demonstrate a renewed commitment to your job.

If you have decided that the job you're currently at may not be working for you anymore, you can also look elsewhere for opportunities to take on new responsibilities. Look to your community and see if there is a way you can give back while also practising the skills you have learned. In doing so, you gain experience to add to your resume and expand your

network. You never know where your next work opportunity is coming from or who pays attention to you.

Nowadays, there are online volunteer job boards where charities post requests for specialised skills. Let's say you decided to do a coding boot camp through an online self-guided course on Coursera. Now, you're looking for projects to practice your new coding skills. You can use a website like Charity Village to find an organisation looking for a volunteer coder to build their website. The organisation gets a volunteer; you get real-world experience to take to your boss or add to your resume for a future application.

Don't be afraid to quit. In his book, *The Dip: A Little Book That Teaches You When to Quit (and When to Stick)*, Seth Godin says [3]:

"Winners quit all the time. They just quit the right stuff at the right time."

What does he mean by that?

He means that you should recognise when an opportunity is just not working for you and the optimal time to move on. Quitting your job without renewing your skills is likely the wrong time, as you won't have recent accomplishments to show a prospective employer. Similarly, not leaving out of fear or complacency will just get you stuck all over again. It can be challenging for us to recognise when it is the "right time" to quit, which is why having a solid network is crucial when getting out of stagnancy.

Networking is a no-brainer for any workspace. As I said before, you never know where your next work opportunity is coming from, and a healthy network can illuminate paths you did not expect. Try scheduling a lunch or coffee with a coworker whose work ethic you admire so you can share best practices more informally. If you are getting more involved in activities outside of work, start asking people questions about what they do and why they like it. Doing so will broaden your horizons and even provide fresh new ideas or experiences to take back to your job.

Authentic networks are created from mutual respect, empathy, and admiration. Don't just chase someone down because you noticed they've received praise recently, as you may soon realise you have nothing to talk about. Try to find coworkers, fellow volunteers, or other members of your community whom you feel comfortable going to for advice or have other things in common with. Developing an honest rapport means you can start getting feedback that will help you towards your goals. The people around you can see the hills and valleys of your experience better than you can because they are more removed from your situation. In periods of stagnancy, that perspective can motivate you to get up and make a change.

There's no shame in feeling stagnant at work. We all do at one point or another. The key takeaway from today is to learn to recognize it and grow. With a few seemingly small pivots, you can find your map again and get off this automatic path you have been on. And who

knows! It may lead to a crossroad that sends you down a path you never thought was possible before!

This week, work on identifying the reasons why you may be stagnating. Maybe it's confidence, or maybe it's comfort. Whatever it is, being aware is your first step towards new success.

That's all for today. Thanks for listening.

[1] Indeed.com - The Complete Guide to Overcoming Career Stagnation, Indeed Editorial Team (2023)

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/career-stagnation>

[2] Career Stagnation: How to Get Out of a Rut at Work, Nora Leon (2020)

<https://www.welcometothejungle.com/en/articles/career-stagnation-how-to-get-out-of-a-rut-at-work>

[3] The Dip: A Little Book That Teaches You When to Quit (and When to Stick), Seth Godin (2007)