

Not in Love with Your Work Anymore? 7 Ways to Reignite Your Passion

Career Development





February is considered by many to be the month of love as we celebrate Valentine’s Day with our loved ones, but what if you find yourself in a dead-end relationship? What if you wake up one morning and finally admit to yourself that denial has not saved you from the unavoidable reality that

you've fallen out of love … with your work?

This month's Career column shares seven ways to reignite your passion for your work, starting with finding out when, why, and how you lost your passion.

1. Reflect and reset

It's important to get to the root of the problem(s), but how? Start by getting back to the basics of your role. If you can identify any quick changes that will get you closer to regaining your enthusiasm for your work, implement those changes immediately.

If it's not a quick fix, there are other ways to recapture your excitement. Start by contemplating the best and worst aspects of your role and be honest about it. It may help to keep a journal. Document the challenges and chronicle the moments you feel most alive at work. Try to do so in real time whenever possible. In other words, if you have to work on a matter that you don't enjoy, write what you didn't like about it and why as soon as you can. It's helpful to have your "in the moment" observations about how you're reacting to work for more detailed insights.

On the other hand, if you work on something that makes you feel excited about your job, write about that. For example, if you successfully negotiate a contract and it makes you feel good, you might write something like: "Negotiated a contract. Felt great because I felt useful to the team and like I contributed something meaningful. It was also nice to congratulate my teammates and get appreciation from them as well."

Over time, with enough entries like this, you'll spot patterns. In the above example, you might realize that contributing meaningfully is important to you. There are countless examples like this; the point is to learn more about yourself and what fulfills you.

When logging your impressions of your work, be sure to be candid with yourself and include recognition of positive and negative emotions and perceptions. Own your words, actions, and thoughts — the good and, although it might be difficult, the bad. You'll get the most out of your journal by being unabashedly self-aware.

With this diary method, you can reflect on your workdays to identify strengths and weaknesses, and, ideally, to understand the essence of your apathy with work. After you've identified patterns or insights, hopefully, you can reconnect with and focus on your strengths.

This recounting can also help you identify a better job routine. For example, perhaps you're doing work that's not necessary for you to do. If you don't like reviewing a certain type of agreement and there is an eager paralegal or contracts analyst or intern who would like to learn about those contracts, teach them and delegate those reviews. Appropriately delegating work can solve a world of ills and help you find your way back to loving your work.

Part of this process is to think about the impact you have. Sometimes, people feel dissatisfied with their roles if they don't feel like their work has meaning. Thus, it may help to find the significance in your work. When we think of meaningful work, we often think of emergency personnel, nurses, teachers, or the members of the military. Your contribution does not, necessarily, have to be stereotypically profound, as corporate law doesn't lend itself to that, unless you're working for a mission-driven organization.

The significance of your role can be as simple as something like making a colleague's job a little bit easier by doing your job exceptionally well. Whatever makes you feel good about your impact on the world, even if it's just your little corner of the world, can make a difference in how you feel about work. And, the bonus is that it can also make a difference in others' lives — those who you affect. It's truly a win-win.

Ultimately, your goal is to evaluate all of your options, both short-term and long-term. Options give you control and your power back. Make good choices for you and you'll be on track to finding that loving feeling again.

2. Remember what you love

Part of the benefit of the reflection method described above is that it allows you to remind yourself what you love at work and in your personal life. Both can affect your happiness with your current role.

In order to reconnect with your passions — assuming that you were once fulfilled in your role — remember how you felt on the first day or in the first few weeks or months of your job. In doing so, remind yourself why you wanted this position. This should help you remember the good days, get in touch with what you love, and reconnect with your purposes. For example, if you wanted the job because negotiating contracts excites you, perhaps that's a love of yours that you've started to take for granted as work politics and personalities crept into your work life.

If you're a visual and/or more concrete thinker, it can help to focus your mind on what you really love by making a list of what has been bringing you down and what has been lifting you up. For example, you may list things like:

Pros

- Negotiating
- Internal clients
- Beautiful office
- Generous compensation package

Cons

- Work politics
- Constant long hours/missing loved ones
- Poor management
- Lack of flexible work options

Writing out what you love and what you can't stand will clarify how you truly feel about your job. These tips can help you fix what is making you dejected and restore your love of the good things at your office.

3. Take care of yourself

While focusing on yourself might feel selfish, lawyer burnout is very real and in-house counsel are not immune to it. You'll benefit those around you more by ensuring that you're at your best for them.

The following advice might sound more like work than self-care, but I promise that it will benefit you to organize your office. Unless you're an anomaly who works better with a mess, decluttering your desk will help you focus on work and be happy in your environment.

It will also create a welcoming space for your colleagues so that you can collaborate with them. Sometimes during my most stressful times at work, I took 15 minutes to neaten up my space and it made me feel calmer, making me much more productive.

If you've fallen out of love with your job, decluttering isn't the only answer. You may need to take some time off. A day of rest, or several, may do the trick. Perhaps it's as simple as taking a vacation or staycation. The point is to rest and refresh.

Of course, try other methods to de-stress: meditating, engaging in hobbies you enjoy, and spending time with loved ones. Nurture your well-being by doing what makes you healthier. Perhaps you can eat better, drink less alcohol, or exercise more. I'm constantly working on eating better and exercising more. Most likely, you have some way you could live healthier. Commit to that.

If losing your passion for work comes from something deeper than just work, seek support from a professional and/or loved ones. There is no shame in doing so as it shows strength to get help.

4. Work on your network

Expanding your network can resolve any issues you have with your job by helping you draw support from and reconnect with the community and, possibly, even by presenting you with other opportunities that may be a better fit for you.

Be open-minded when expanding your network by connecting to those in other industries. Always be cautious, but cast a wide net in making these contacts. For example, I am much more liberal in my acceptance of connections on LinkedIn than I am on Facebook. LinkedIn is meant for sharing your professional life, to a reasonable extent, with others.

You may find meaningful networking opportunities in your day-to-day life by connecting or reconnecting with your coworkers. Technology can be wonderfully beneficial, but there are times when only true human interaction will fill up our soul. Make human connections in real life.

Part of expanding your connections can include mentorship opportunities, both as a mentor and as a mentee. You may find meaning in helping others advance and in celebrating others' success as a mentor. Even if you're not a formal mentor to someone and they do something well, you can cheer them on and feel your impact that way.

5. Exercise your intellect

I love to learn, so stimulating my brain keeps me engaged in my work. Keep growing by continually learning new things. This can be as informal as asking your tech-savvy coworkers to explain something to you or as formal as creating an education plan for yourself.

Regarding the former, promise yourself that you will learn something new once a week. Seek a new challenge or project at work or outside of work.

Regarding the latter, your education plan could include getting a degree you've always wanted like an MBA or, in my case, a project management certificate. My colleague came to me and asked me if I wanted to take a project management course administered by a local university in conjunction with my company.

As described above, you never know what your networks will offer. To this day, I am so thankful that my coworker brought this opportunity to me because it was interesting and fulfilling.

Every Friday morning, I went to the project management class, and it taught me a whole new way of thinking about tackling projects — and I loved it. It also made me realize why some of my internal clients approached projects the way they did. So, not only did I learn for myself, but I also bonded with the colleague who brought this opportunity to me, met and got to know other colleagues who were taking the class with us, and grew to understand my internal clients and their work methods better.

You hear the phrase "curiosity killed the cat" all the time, but the remainder of that expression is often left out. The full adage is, "Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back." Curiosity is good. As long as you don't make foolish choices, seeking new experiences is a good thing. If you remain open to always challenge yourself, you have a better chance at remaining satisfied with your professional and personal life.

6. Clarify your aspirations

One reason you may have fallen out of love with your job or career is a misunderstanding of your own aspirations. It's important to focus on your goals and, again, be honest with yourself and open to change.

If you are authentic when acknowledging your objectives, you may find new meaning and uncover a new direction for yourself that you hadn't thought of or admitted to yourself before. Or, you may realize that you strive to remain on your current trajectory, but in a different way that makes you happy.

7. Do more or step back

By using these steps, you may find that you need new projects or more challenges. If that is the case, take that promotion you're offered. Step out of your comfort zone and try something new. Start a side hustle. Volunteer with an organization that is important to you. Do what awakens your spirit.

On the flip side, you may find that you are doing too much. If so, you may need to take a leave or step back a bit from stressors in your life. If your mind and body are signaling you that you're engaged in too much, cut back on some side projects to lighten your load.

If all else fails

If none of the above works, it may be time to admit to yourself that you need to embrace your current situation or make a genuine change. If you can't rekindle that spark for your job or profession, you might need to think about a transition. Sure, it's scary to think about, but being unhappy doing your job for the rest of your life is a scarier thought.

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In her role as senior legal counsel with Vendavo, Inc., Colombo works cross-functionally with the relevant business teams and stakeholders, providing legal advice on a broad range of topics and guiding the business on legal compliance with a particular focus on drafting, managing, and negotiating client and vendor contracts of moderate-to-high complexity from the bid phase through contract execution, including software licensing and SaaS-specific provisions, as well as matters related to contractual liability and risk-shifting provisions, data privacy, intellectual property, and products.