

Rose Porterfield Group

“Are you happy in your job?”

January 2008 Newsletter

If you aren't happy in your job it's rarely ever a simple problem. There are usually a number of reasons and a number of solutions.

HAPPINESS AT WORK

More than one weary executive has used the old line, “If it were supposed to be fun they would call it fun instead of work.” And certainly no job is all fun.

Nevertheless most of us are either having fun at work or can remember a time when work was fun.

If you wake up in the morning with a certain amount of dread – or even a lack of excitement – something may be wrong and it may be something you can fix.

In our work—whether coaching, assessment, or training—we are about improving the bottom line – but, however naive it may sound that always involves improving job satisfaction at the individual level.

THINGS THAT CAN INTERFERE WITH HAPPINESS

Doing the same old thing may be a problem. We all need a challenge or a change of pace from time to time. Boredom is often just that; but, often it is a disguise for underlying fear of failure or change.

Bad fit with the organization may be the problem. Perhaps the organization has changed or you have and this is no longer the place for you. In most cases a bad fit with the job is a bad fit with your immediate supervisor.

Personal problems are affecting work. No one has a perfect life and your personal life issues can affect your enjoyment of work – and vice versa.

HOW DO YOU FIND OUT WHAT IS BOTHERING YOU?

Great idea! Well....maybe not.

Talking to friends or your spouse. Unfortunately, while your spouse is usually a good information resource about you, in the case of your job it seldom works. Your spouse may know you well, but they simply cannot entirely understand what you face. And the common spousal advice: “If you don't like your job just quit!” can be more frustrating than comforting.

Simple testing. The MBTI will tell you if you are an introvert or extravert as well as your score in three other categories then finally placing you in one of 16 categories. The MBTI and other such tests have great value in certain situations. In the case of determining job satisfaction instruments of this type are simply too limited.

Ahh....yes that sounds better.

One suggestion we often make is to look at the situation in steps. Make a list of the top 10-15 aspects of your current job. After you have your list, use a critical eye. Are there any aspects of your job that cause you a great deal of distress? Embarrassment? Angst? Any aspects that you still, after all these years, are uncomfortable with? This exercise is a quick way to determine whether your unhappiness is behavior-related or people-related.

If you answered “no” to the questions above, then your problem may be the environment or the people you work with. E.g., your boss. If you answered “yes”, ask yourself this question, “would you feel differently if you were doing the same job at another firm?”

If the answer is “no”, that ‘s good information! Maybe the job is the problem.

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP?

Outside help. There are useful life coaches. There are also people who have been through five month – or five day – training and while they may be enthusiastic people they do not have the experience to understand you or your job. You wouldn’t have surgery from someone with only a few months of training? We recently wrote an article, [“Choosing and using an executive coach”](#), where we offer some simple tips for how to vet coaches.

Personal Assessment.

You may want to consider having an assessment either on your own or under the sponsorship of your organization.

An assessment is performed by PhD level psychologists using C-level personality tests, intelligence tests and interest inventories. The MBTI gives 16 personality types but there are far more than 16 in reality. C-level tests such as the NEO yield trillions of personality types.

What does it tell you? In the hands of an expert you get to look at multiple facets of your personality – phrased in behavioral terms – that help you look at how you work, interact with others, cope with stress. You may know that you sometimes come across as abrupt but you may not know why. And it is the knowing why that allows you to gain control of the behavior.

You may find that there is nothing wrong with work. Sometimes we do find that personal issues are the only

issues, but more often we find that job dissatisfaction is at least part of the problem

TAKING ACTION AFTER A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

On-going coaching.

Some people elect to continue with coaching beyond the assessment. The best coaching is tailored exactly to your current needs rather than generic “let’s improve your life.” In other cases you may feel that you have learned all you need with the initial assessment. In any case assessment and coaching are only tools to use in making things better.

Change of job or career.

We have seen cases in which people changed jobs. The most extreme was a dentist who, after an assessment, decided he needed to go into retail men’s wear. He closed his practice, bought some stores and never looked back. He is a happy man today. That is rare. Changing jobs can be great or it can be what is called a “location cure” – hoping things will get better just because you are in another place.

Test-drive a different job or career.

Volunteering is a good way to step out of your comfort zone without making a big leap. Let’s say you’re in a high-stress job where you deal with difficult clients all day long and you’re really a shy person—making conversation is a chore. You have always thought you’d be happier doing something with numbers, computers, etc. but never had the nerve to give up your job for a “maybe fit”. Volunteer to do some “back office” work at a local charity, school, church, etc. See if it is everything you think it would be.

Develop yourself, change your job structure, or go back to school.

In many cases people stay in the same job but are able to develop themselves by using a compensatory mechanism that helps situations be less stressful. One of our clients found that she came across as abrupt in meetings. She is working on that but she also takes her assistant to meetings because the assistant acts as a more approachable buffer. If the problem is no formal training, go back and get it.

Let’s face it. Changing jobs is never easy and changing careers takes even more nerve—or motivating pain. And the older you get, the more money you make, the more people you have depending on you—all contribute to making this option a tough one.

Ironically, the older we get the more clear we also get on what makes us happy and satisfied. For many of us we only become aware of our job dissatisfaction in our late 30’s or 40’s—sometimes later. The upside is, at this age we know enough to make better decisions and appreciate a really great fit when we find it.

RPG has helped in the selection and development of thousands of people primarily at the executive level. For more information visit our website at: www.roseporterfieldgroup.com

Robyn W. Porterfield, PhD
Managing Principal
porterfield@roseporterfieldgroup.com

Robert G. Rose, PhD
Principal
rose@roseporterfieldgroup.com

