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# HIT THE RESET BUTTON ON YOUR CAREER

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A Collection of Career Change Insights From  
UW Professional & Continuing Education

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## DARE TO DO

Ready to start something new? We know making a career change can feel daunting. That's why we're here to help you get ready for what's next.

We've gathered a few of our favorite Career Insights articles to inspire you to step out and explore, to start down a new path and help you on the journey. Get expert insights on saying good bye to a job you hate, networking successfully and asking for career advice.

If you're looking for more career tips and trends, check out our full Career Insights series on our website at [pce.uw.edu/career-insights](http://pce.uw.edu/career-insights).

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# **WHY WE SETTLE FOR JOBS WE HATE AND HOW TO BREAK FREE**

By: Michelle Goodman

Once upon a time, you liked your job. Now the magic is gone. To improve your outlook, you've tried changing teams, duties, work hours. You've talked to your boss, started telecommuting on Fridays, taken up meditation. But to no avail. You're still miserable.

Sadly, you're not alone: Nearly two-thirds of Americans are [disengaged at work](#), unhappy in their job and phoning it in.

If you have yet to hatch an escape plan, you're in good company. "A lot of people prefer the slow torture of constant discomfort to the intense discomfort of job hunting," says vocational psychologist and career coach [Janet Scarborough Civitelli](#), who regularly counsels dissatisfied workers.

Ring any bells? Perhaps some of the following excuses for treading water at a job you've grown to loathe will, too. But not to worry. I'll dismantle these reasons one by one and offer some steps you can take to make a change.

**INNER THOUGHT:** The economy isn't what it used to be. I'll never find something else.

**REALITY CHECK:** Untrue. The hiring market has improved by leaps and bounds since the recession. A recent [CareerBuilder report](#) puts hiring rates for full-time permanent positions at an all-time high since 2006. Seasonal hiring is up, too, which is good news if you're looking for something temporary, maybe to help pay for school or an unexpected medical expense.

**INNER THOUGHT: I'm the breadwinner in my household.**

**REALITY CHECK:** Certainly having other mouths to feed complicates things. Maybe your family isn't prepared to give up your Cadillac health insurance plan, or maybe your generous work-from-home privileges give you the flexibility to care for a special needs child or aging parent. It's possible your scarcely tolerable job is the only one within reach that meets your financial and scheduling needs. But how do you know unless you've looked?

A job you hate doesn't have to be a life sentence, Scarborough Civitelli says. "You can still move toward work that will be a better fit for you, even if the progress happens over time and requires sacrifices, such as having less free time if you pursue additional education," she adds. "Small, consistent steps can cumulatively lead to big changes."

**Inner Thought: I've already invested in this job, company or profession.**

**REALITY CHECK:** Let's set aside for a moment the absurdity of continuing to do something that pains you because you've invested time or money in it. Even if the only takeaway from your job is knowing how to avoid the ire of volatile managers, that's a valuable skill – one you're sure to put to use in your professional and personal life hundreds of times over. But I doubt that's the only knowledge and experience you've gained at your current gig.

Every position exposes you to a particular industry, clientele and skill set. Maybe you don't like working on a software help desk team, but you love assisting others. Maybe you don't like supervising people, but you love the number-crunching part of being a manager. Maybe you're curious about the work your Web design colleagues down the hall do and want to learn more. You get the idea.

**INNER THOUGHT: I've only been here a year.**

**REALITY CHECK:** The era of sticking with one job or company for years (or decades) on end is over. The world will not slip off its axis if, after all your efforts to better it, you leave a deadbeat gig after 12 months. Nor will potential employers judge you unfairly. In a recent CareerBuilder survey, nearly a third of companies polled said they now expect employees to job hop. More than half said they've hired people whose last position was short-lived. And almost half said they expected younger workers – those less likely to have hit their professional stride – to stay at a position two years or less.

**INNER THOUGHT: My team needs me.**

**REALITY CHECK:** While loyalty and dedication are admirable traits, you unfortunately can't count on your employer to show you the same courtesy. Should money grow tight, they won't hesitate to eighty-six you or dump an outsized pile of work in your lap. It's possible your loyalty may earn you more responsibilities and a higher salary, but a job you dislike is still a job you dislike, even with a few thousand extra dollars in the bank and a fancier email signature. So forget corporate chivalry. And if your company's in trouble, forget going down with the ship. Listen to the people in your life outside of work, the ones who really need you. I'm guessing they'd prefer it if you threw on a life preserver and made the jump.

**INNER THOUGHT: I hate networking and interviewing.**

**REALITY CHECK:** As a fellow introvert and a recovering wallflower, I empathize. But these are important life skills to have, much like showing up to work in freshly washed clothes or paying your bills in a timely manner. After all, you never know when your employer might decide to clean house.

Entire books, websites and social media platforms focus on how to look for work, ace the interview and hobnob with industry colleagues, even if you stink at small talk. If you can't bear to go it alone, consider joining a meetup group for job hunters or hiring a coach to walk you through the process. With practice, you'll soon find that job hunting, when done well, has much in common with apartment hunting or car shopping – it's a necessary evil, but nothing to hide under the covers about.

**INNER THOUGHT: I don't know what I want to do next.**

**REALITY CHECK:** If you're stumped on what type of job or career to pursue, it's time to start asking yourself some questions. Doing this will help jumpstart your research process. A few questions you can begin with: What did you enjoy doing as a child? When did you feel on top of the world? What aspects of your work do you love? What do friends and colleagues always say you excel at? What type of work environment appeals to you? What do you want to learn next?

From there, the Internet, the library, social networks like LinkedIn, and the many classes and events out there, like those offered by [UW Professional & Continuing Education](#), are at your disposal to help you learn more and move forward.

Excuses like the ones above often have more to do with emotional reactions than facts. Yes, you should be grateful to have a job at all. Yes, other people may depend on you to bring home the bacon. And yet it's entirely possible that another job that meets your personal and professional needs – without making you miserable – is out there.

Realizing you're ready to pull up professional stakes can be liberating. The trick is to push past the fear and enjoy the exploration. Tackle one quick 15-minute step a week, if that's all you can squeeze in. Attack it with the same gusto you would planning a long-anticipated vacation. Even the smallest bit of forward momentum can invigorate you. We spend too much time at work to let it ruin our daily disposition. Time for you to make the most of your professional life.



*Guest writer Michelle Goodman is an award-winning journalist and author based in Seattle. [Her books](#) – *The Anti 9-to-5 Guide* and *My So-Called Freelance Life* – offer an irreverent twist on the traditional career guide. She specializes in writing about work, entrepreneurship and career change.*

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# SEVEN TIPS FOR WINNING AT NETWORKING

By: Matt Youngquist

**W**hen it comes to making a career change or tracking down employment opportunities, most people scour the Web endlessly, agonize over their resumes and attend a slew of random networking meetings in hopes of turning up viable leads. Honestly, there's a simpler concept that's likely to make an even bigger difference in your success – and it can be summed up in two words: Be coachable.

I know, this statement doesn't seem very profound at first. But given that most job opportunities these days are filled through word of mouth, we all need to get extremely comfortable with the notion of reaching out to people and asking for assistance.

But here's the catch. Just asking lots of people for help isn't likely to produce the results you're seeking. You have to actually be coachable in the first place. This quality isn't nearly as universal as one might think. Many people run around networking their tail off, seeking advice and referrals, but then handle things inappropriately and drop the ball when it counts.

On this note, I'd offer up these seven specific tips for how to be more coachable:

## **1 Clarify your needs.**

Before asking anybody for a helping hand, do your homework. What are the specific issues you need guidance on? What questions can you benefit most from having answered? The clearer your agenda, the less chance you'll waste your time – or other people's. For example, just saying to somebody, "I need help finding a job," isn't likely to get you very far. But you might walk away with some killer suggestions if you were to say something like, "I'm not very comfortable with the networking process but have noticed you seem to be naturally good at it. Any tips or insights you'd be willing to share about how I might improve in that area?"

## 2 Identify information gaps.

When you're in the process of hunting for work, it's easy to run out of steam or get paralyzed by indecision. If this happens, try to identify the specific data you're missing that would help you get unstuck and start confidently moving forward again. For example, if you can't decide whether or not to pursue a career as a real estate agent, pin down the information you need to make a firm decision. Do you need to get a better sense of what real estate careers pay? Or what schooling and certification is required? Or how many real estate agents entering the field actually succeed in the long term? Figuring out the knowledge gaps holding you back will go a long way toward helping you determine exactly who you need to be talking to – and what type of input you need to solicit from them.

## 3 Don't advice shop.

As you might imagine (and possibly have experienced yourself), there are a healthy number of people out there who seek out help with all manner of issues – both personal and professional – but are clearly not open to changing their ways or adjusting their behavior one iota. Instead, they're just looking for somebody to confirm their current thinking or validate their pre-existing notions. Don't be that person. If you're truly out there asking for help, be ready to get out of your comfort zone and try some new approaches to the challenges you're facing. As one therapist I know remarked once, in terms of helping people overcome their fear of change, "When I run into this kind of resistance, I often just ask people, 'So your current way of going about things, how's that working out for you again?'"

## 4 Respond to the advice offered.

Amazing career possibilities and breakthroughs get overlooked every day due to folks remaining too passive during the networking process. In a nutshell, when you reach out to somebody for help and they offer you a suggestion, you're obligated to respond to their advice in some concrete form. Don't just stare at them blankly or move on to the next issue. Acknowledge their advice and tell them how you feel about it. Ideally, you'd say something like, "That idea makes perfect sense; I'll give it a try in the next few days and let you know how it goes." Alternatively, if you're unclear about what they're suggesting, ask for clarification. Heck, you might even push back and explain why you don't think the advice will work in your case or let the other person know why you probably won't implement it right away. But whatever you do, don't respond with a blank stare. This type of nonanswer short-circuits the dialogue and usually makes the other person suspect their advice is falling on deaf ears.

## 5 Take notes.

Taking the above concept further, I'm shocked by how many people approach others for assistance but then fail to write down any of the information shared, such as referral names, website suggestions, action steps and the like. Even if you have a photographic memory, signal to the person helping you that you are taking them seriously by whipping out a notebook and jotting some of their ideas down on paper. You could also do this by recording the conversation on your cell phone, if it's appropriate and you've asked the other person up front for permission to do so.

## 6 **Avoid assumptions.**

Another important step you'll want to take when networking and asking for help is to request clarification when you don't understand the context or motivation behind a piece of advice you've been given. For example, let's say a helpful soul invites you to "call so-and-so in my network, using my name," but you don't understand the referral since the person cited doesn't work in your target field. When something like this happens, remind yourself that the referring party likely had a good reason for making the suggestion, but perhaps didn't express it effectively. In this case, maybe the person in question doesn't work in the field but is related to somebody who is a heavy-hitter in the industry. The bottom line? If you're unclear why a person offered a recommendation or referral, don't make assumptions or jump to conclusions. Ask them to explain their rationale. They're usually not crazy. More than likely, they just failed to walk you through their thought process.

## 7 **Don't drop the ball.**

Last but not least, once you've hit somebody up for advice and told them you're going to act on it, you're saddled with a singular obligation. You are now duty-bound to give their idea a full-faith try, see what transpires and then report your results back to them. Doing so not only confirms to the assisting individual that you're truly coachable and not wasting their time, but will also help the other person brainstorm further with you and course correct your

efforts if your initial results didn't bear much fruit. What's more, it rewards the other person psychologically, letting them feel helpful – which is ultimately the key to great networking and why so many people love doing a good turn for others.

In closing, while not the flashiest topic you'll ever see talked about regarding career success, I believe the concept of coachability is a critical one – and those folks who learn how to ask for and receive help gracefully will get a lot farther, faster in today's world. So if you're an aspiring professional and still trying to get a firm handle on the concept of networking, the coachability theme might be one well worth thinking about and vowing to improve upon going forward!



*Guest writer Matt Youngquist is a recognized career coaching expert and LinkedIn trainer in the greater Seattle area. He's the founder and president of [Career Horizons](#), where he helps clients across the Pacific Northwest tackle the challenges of job hunting and employment transition.*

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# THE RIGHT WAY TO ASK FOR CAREER ADVICE

By: Michelle Goodman

Whether you're new to the workforce or a seasoned pro, you've no doubt heard that one of the best ways to gain insider information about your dream job or industry is to talk to those already in the business. This might mean asking a LinkedIn contact how she got started creating computer game storyboards and scripts. It might mean asking a speaker from a conference you attended how he transitioned from the nonprofit world to corporate America. Or it might mean asking your neighbor's sister-in-law's cousin how she rose to director level at the landscape design firm that employs her.

I'm often on the receiving end of such requests, having worked for myself as a journalist, business writer and author for as long as anyone who knows me can remember. Each week my inbox swells with messages from former coworkers, friends of friends and people I've met at networking events who want advice about writing for a living. As you might suspect, I've found there's a right way and a wrong way to tap an acquaintance for professional suggestions.

Here are eight ways to ensure your request for help is well received.

1

### **Educate yourself on the role or field first.**

Have you devoured every Web post, e-book and affordable workshop you can find on the industry or job title you covet? Have you researched basic details like the salary range, educational requirements and day-to-day job duties? If not, get cracking – before you reach out to industry vets in the trenches.

The more informed you are on your desired professional path, the more you'll get out of your conversations with the pros. Take time to do the legwork and you'll impress advice givers. Skip this critical step and you risk coming across as someone who can't be bothered to make the minimum effort – and thus, a person unworthy of a pro's valuable time. Some resources to get you started: [salary.com](http://salary.com), [glassdoor.com](http://glassdoor.com) and [bls.gov/ooh](http://bls.gov/ooh).



## 2 Research your contact before getting in touch.

[LinkedIn](#) is one of the most useful tools on the Internet. Don't be afraid to use it. Brush up on your contact's career trajectory, education and accolades as well as their employer's history and mission.

Remember, there's no shame in complimenting your contact's recent success: an award, some good press, a product you admire. Flattery will get you far. It may even make the difference between landing the meeting or not. At the very least, it shows you've done your homework. After all, no one wants to go out of their way to help an industry greenhorn who can't even be bothered to read their CV.

## 3 Work around your contact's schedule.

I work 45 to 60 minutes from downtown Seattle, depending on traffic. At least once a month, someone invites me to coffee downtown for the express purpose of "picking my brain." First of all, that sounds painful. Second, I don't have the three midday hours such a meeting would require. So I ask people to come to me or call me after business hours.

To increase your odds of getting the meeting, ask where, when and how would be convenient for your contact. For many people, it's at their desk or the café down the street from their office. Ask for just 20 to 30 minutes of their time. If they want to give you more, they will. Be prepared for anything. Some people prefer [walking meetings](#). Others only do Skype calls or Google Hangouts. If the meeting's important enough to you, you'll go with the flow. And by all means, pay for their coffee.

## 4 **Come prepared to the meeting.**

Spend some time thinking about the questions you want to ask. Write them down in case you blank mid-meeting, and list them in order of importance. Depending how much time you have with the person, you may not get to them all. Forget questions you can easily answer online. Instead, ask about details missing from the person's bio, social media profiles and published interviews with the media. Take notes during the call or meeting; the last thing you want to do is email the person afterward to ask for a recap.

## 5 **Ask specific questions.**

During the meeting, keep questions short and precise. No one has time to give you a crash course on everything they've learned about their profession in the past decade or two. When someone asks me, "Can you tell me how to freelance?" or "How do I start writing professionally?" I point them to my books and a couple of my favorite online resources. Questions like those are too vast for me to answer in one quick message or coffee date.

The more targeted your questions, the more useful an answer you'll get. Two of my favorite examples: "What was the most valuable class, book or resource that helped you prepare for this job?" and "What's the biggest mistake you see newbies make in this profession?"

## 6 Temper your expectations.

One meeting probably won't turn an acquaintance into a lifelong mentor or your next boss. And just because someone gave you 20, 30 or 45 minutes of their time doesn't mean they'll appreciate you ping-ponging them for weekly advice going forward.

A better approach to building long-term connections is to find out which professional groups your contact belongs to and join them. There's no faster way to grow your network in an industry. Often your contact's LinkedIn profile and company bio will unearth this information. If not, ask which online and offline groups they recommend. Supplement this intel with your own research into relevant professional associations. If you're based in the Puget Sound region, [iloveseattle.org](http://iloveseattle.org) is a great place to start.

## 7 Strike while the iron's hot.

If an advice giver offers to review your portfolio, introduce you to another industry contact or pass along your resume to their HR department, follow up by the next morning while you're still fresh in their mind. Wait too long and their desire to help may recede or the window of opportunity may slam shut – for example, if they abruptly leave their job or get saddled with a lengthy flu or an all-consuming project.

## 8 Send a small thank-you gift.

Yes, a gift, as in a \$5 coffee card or a \$10 box of chocolates (though I suggest adding a zero if they introduce you to your next employer). Why? Because if someone has been at their profession five years or more, chances are they get requests like yours all the time. Most of the people they help will send a quick “Thanks so much!” via email, text or social media. Some won’t bother to send a message of thanks at all.

But every so often, someone they’ve advised will snail mail them a note and token gift of thanks. These advice seekers make the best impression. They’re the ones advice givers are happiest to introduce to their colleagues at professional events. They may even be the first person an advice giver tips off if an appropriate spot at their company opens up.

In the end, your goal should be to make it as easy as possible for your career heroes to lend a hand. Ask them to jump through too many hoops, and your plea for guidance will fall flat. Be a gracious advice seeker and you’ll forge a clearer path to the career you want.



*Guest writer Michelle Goodman is an award-winning journalist and author based in Seattle. [Her books](#) – *The Anti 9-to-5 Guide* and *My So-Called Freelance Life* – offer an irreverent twist on the traditional career guide. She specializes in writing about work, entrepreneurship and career change.*

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