

CAREER *FATIGUE*

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WHAT IS MONDAY MORNING LIKE FOR YOU?

Are you energized about the week ahead? Or does the thought of another week at the office fill you with dread? If you are more inclined to the latter, you are not alone.

A report issued earlier this year indicates that half of all Americans today are dissatisfied with their jobs, up nearly 10 percent since 1995. With job dissatisfaction on the increase, it has become imperative to recognize the symptoms of career fatigue in its early stages, and to prevent it from taking over your life.

Kevin received his first career break shortly after graduating from college when he accepted a sales position with a Fortune 100 company that was poised to introduce an industry-first product. The company, its products, and the team-oriented culture offered an exciting opportunity for Kevin to launch his career. During his seven-year tenure, Kevin was given a variety of sales and marketing challenges and his performance was rewarded with four promotions. As the industry exploded, Kevin became a hot commodity. He accepted a job offer from a competitor and spent the next eight years focused on advancing his stature as a leader in the industry. For several years the new job delivered all that it promised. Projects and challenges were plentiful, as were the financial rewards for his technical acumen and leadership talent. It would seem that at age 38 Kevin was at the top of his game. Why then was Kevin in career crisis and contacting our office for coaching? The simple answer; Kevin had worked for 16 years in the same industry, was depleted of interest and motivation, and sorely unprepared to make the quick exit he desired. Kevin was stuck in the final stage of a Career Life Cycle.

Over the past 20 years, we have worked with hundreds of men and women like Kevin. The phenomenon we call "career fatigue" is unfortunately quite common, particularly among baby boom professionals. Long gone are the days where people work for the same company from the time they finish school until the day they retire. In fact, today's professionals are likely to hold a dozen jobs and as many as four different careers over the course of their work life. Most professionals don't consider this reality when they leave school to start their career. As a result, many talented individuals are caught unaware and unprepared when they find themselves in the grips of career fatigue down the road.

ARE YOU SUFFERING FROM CAREER FATIGUE?

Career fatigue is an unshakable weariness from the routine, tasks, activities and challenges of an established profession. Career fatigue creeps in when you are no longer interested in the majority of the tasks required in your role; when you look around and can't identify a job you want or position that interests you in your current industry; when you would rather spend time exploring personal interests than focusing on the job at hand; when new assignments feel like you've 'been there done that'; or when your head chatter begins the pro and con debate of making a move. Career fatigue zaps us of our creative and productive energy, and has a pervasive influence on our attitude.

CAREER FATIGUE or JOB BURN-OUT?

While career fatigue and job burn-out share some of the same symptoms, the experiences are quite different. Individuals with *career fatigue* are ready to change their chosen profession. They have lost interest and motivation in the work they do year-to-year. They are at a personal crossroads and need to make a dramatic professional change. On the other hand, professionals experiencing *job burn-out* still enjoy their profession and their work. They have no interest in changing careers but rather are mentally and physically exhausted from the day-to-day demands and need a break to recharge.

Professionals who experience job burn-out tend to point to external conditions for cause. Consistent overwork, unrelenting project deadlines, constant or unpredictable travel demands, lack of work/life balance, caustic work environments, and focus on short term activities vs. long term goals are factors typically cited.

Conversely, career fatigue is caused by an internal shift when the individual is no longer fulfilled in their current profession and is ready to explore something new. The internal shift may not have an immediate affect on

the individual's attitude or performance, or be obvious to the outside world. In fact, it is possible to be in the grip of career fatigue and maintain the appearance that you are at the top of your game. Case in point, Michael Jordan. In 1993 Michael won his third consecutive NBA title, was at the pinnacle of his basketball career and threw in the towel to try his hand at professional baseball. We often wonder how long Michael had been thinking about making such a significant change.

CAREERS ARE LIKE BATTERIES

Almost everyone experiences peaks and valleys in their work life. So how do you know when you are experiencing career fatigue versus job burn-out? Think of a career like a car battery. When you first start out, you are charged and raring to go. It's great for awhile, perhaps for many years. Over time you find that your interest and energy begins to fluctuate. You can intermittently recharge by engaging in new projects, challenges, roles, routines, or changes of location. However as time goes on, if you find that your work creates a constant drain on your energy and no longer sparks interest or excitement, then it's probably time to consider a change. Like a car battery, a career for some people may have a life span. When it's depleted, it's time for replacement.

In coaching professionals, we have discovered that career fatigue is not a phenomenon that surfaces all of a sudden, but rather builds gradually over time. We find that self-aware individuals tend to be conscious of career fatigue warning signs earlier in the process. For those who are not as introspective or simply are too busy to read the signs, career fatigue can hit like a ton of bricks. Career fatigue does not discriminate by age, experience, or job title. We coach as many victims of career fatigue in their early 30's as we do seasoned pros.

Shortly after graduating with dual degrees in business and agricultural science, Sean accepted a job with a commodities trading firm. The position provided Sean with an excellent opportunity to apply his education and make money along the way. Sean loved the work and excelled quickly, establishing his reputation as a rising star. After five years on the job, Sean's interest for the profession began to wane. He was tiring of the pace and pressure, but recognized that it would be difficult to walk away from the income. Despite the warning signs, Sean stayed on for two more years. It was during those two years that Sean made a few costly trading errors. He would show up for a trade but his head wasn't in the game. He didn't lose his job but he lost his edge, his ability to stay focused and his confidence. It was time to make a career change and Sean finally figured that out. At age 30 Sean started a new career in sales. He accepted a job with a company offering the earnings potential he desired and selling products which were of great interest to him. With the change Sean felt he had a new lease on life.

While career fatigue typically settles in over time, the cycle can be accelerated by any of life's traumatic events such as divorce, illness, death of a loved one, a natural disaster. Introspection often occurs during these difficult times, and typically generates a new perspective and change in intention for living and working.

In addition, turbulent workplace dynamics can accelerate the process of career fatigue. Unfortunately this has occurred more frequently over the past few years as the uncertain economy spurred hiring freezes and downsizing. Professionals around the country who were lucky enough to hold their jobs have been tasked to do more with less, especially less staff resources. This workplace dynamic has significantly increased work/life balance pressures for most in professional positions. What many employers don't realize is that extremely high-pressured work scenarios can cause key talent to begin a reality check on their career plan and workplace values. While

THE WARNING SIGNS!

Begin to take control of your professional life by recognizing warning signs of career fatigue. Once you recognize it, create a plan to manage it. Left unattended, career fatigue will negatively impact your health, your relationships and your success.

Do you **OFTEN**, **SOMETIMES** or **NEVER**:

- Experience a lack of interest in long-term projects?
- Notice a loss of interest and enthusiasm for new challenges and opportunities in your workplace?
- Notice signs of physical or mental fatigue on your way to work?
- Find yourself not wanting to think about the work week ahead?
- Dread the thought of having to go to work?
- Find yourself unusually short tempered with people or projects?
- Find yourself easily distracted by personal interests or activities?
- Notice yourself complaining about your job to anyone who will listen?
- Respond with sarcasm or negativity when asked about your job?
- Find yourself coming to work late or leaving early as often as you can?
- Find that you are no longer motivated by job perks?
- Find yourself being told you have a poor attitude at work?
- Find your work lacks purpose or is unfulfilling?
- Spend time thinking about or talking about what you dislike about your job?

If you rated six or more items as **OFTEN**,
you are in the grip of career fatigue.

If you rated six or more items as **SOMETIMES**,
you are in danger of career fatigue.

professionals are not likely to jump ship when the job market is slow or congested with competition, they will begin to look outside for a better fit as soon as the economy begins to improve.

Kate was 45 when she sought guidance for career transition. Kate had dedicated her career to building a reputation as a leader in the telecommunications advertising field. Her talent, interpersonal savvy and leadership skills quickly elevated Kate to senior management in her firm. At the 22 year mark, Kate's career took an unanticipated blow from the aftermath of 9/11 and corporate fraud lawsuits that crushed the telecom industry. Kate's firm was forced to respond to these external events by downsizing the resources that were dedicated to the telecom segment of the business. As a result, Kate spent the next two years personally conducting the activities previously handled by her staff. During this time, Kate worked more hours and derived less satisfaction from her work than she had in nearly 10 years. Disillusioned with the stagnation in her career, Kate began to soul search. Kate felt she had made her mark in advertising and wanted to try something completely new. Chances are that Kate would have stayed content in advertising if it were not for the changes imposed on her by the company's restructuring. Instead Kate began a transition that lead to a university teaching career.

THE CAREER LIFE CYCLE

Careers have a predictable cycle that is as natural to a person as the human life cycle. As with life, the beginning phase of a career is invigorated by exposure to new experiences that offer exciting opportunities for growth and professional development. The next phase is defined by opportunities that are actively sought out in an effort to build competence and personal reputation. Over time as professional growth and success accumulates, we move into yet another phase of career, a phase where we are sought for expertise and recognized for trade mastery. This last phase is typically not the end of the road, but a major crossroad for many. At this crossroad, some keep their professional lives alive and growing by taking on new challenges, while others begin a slow spiral into career funk.

The five stages of the Career Life Cycle are: Honeymoon, Maintenance, Guru, Slow Sink and Bottom Out. Professionals who are wise to the Career Life Cycle and who are proactive with their development at each stage tend to stay in control of their career destiny.

The first step in getting or maintaining control is to accept that your career path is not set in stone. You don't have to stay with the career you started when you finished school until the day you retire. Your career path should be calibrated every so often to better reflect what is important to you - your workplace values (see insert on Values). Refer back to Sean who, at 25, was drawn to his first profession because it offered him an opportunity to make a good income

and apply his newly attained degree. At age 30, he moved to a new career; one that fulfilled his desire to work directly with customers and travel, and that offered the earnings potential he needed. At age 50, Sean was financially established and changed careers one more time to satisfy the workplace value of independence that rose to importance as he matured professionally. Sean ultimately bought his own business.

The next step toward taking control of your career destiny is to recognize where you are in the Career Life Cycle. Can you identify which stage you are in from the descriptions that follow? Reality testing the cycle can be difficult to do on your own. If you have trouble identifying the phase you are in, seek feedback from a mentor, trusted advisor or career coach.

EMPLOYERS BEWARE

You may be about to lose key talent and the expertise/knowledge that goes along with him/her. Have you noticed a shift in the behavior of a valued employee? Beware it could be the sign of career fatigue.

Behaviors to look for:

- 1) lackluster performance
- 2) shift in attitude towards ambivalence or negativity
- 3) loss of focus, creativity or confidence
- 4) unusual contention in relationships
- 5) decrease in level of commitment

If you see these signs, you would be wise to have a candid conversation with the employee about the behaviors you observe.

Other things to consider about the situation:

- Is this an isolated situation or a larger problem with team morale?
- Can the work environment be changed in any way to mitigate declining morale?
- Is the employees' attitude impacting team performance or other critical work relationships?
- Are there other opportunities the company can offer to retain the talent?
- Have you planned for succession if they decide to leave?

STAGES OF THE CAREER LIFE CYCLE

Honeymoon

The Excitement of New Beginnings

The honeymoon occurs at the onset of a new job or the launch of a new career. At this stage, you are energized by excitement, challenge, learning and possibility. If you are experiencing 'new job' anxiety, it is easily over-powered by a positive attitude about the opportunity before you. The stimulation that you feel in this stage is what you seek to rekindle down the road when you are ready for a career transition.

Maintenance

Career is on Cruise Control

Maintenance begins when you have achieved a certain level of competence and confidence on the job. You continue to accumulate knowledge, gain experience and develop a network of contacts and resources. You have a sense of 'comfortability' in your role. You don't mind working long hours or stretching yourself to get the job done. You have goals or targets that you strive for. You may be enjoying the financial comfort and security of this stage. You can remain content holding your career in maintenance mode for some time, especially if it satisfies your workplace values. The effort you put into your work, however, could begin to create tension between work and personal life balance.

Guru

Top of your Game

When you've reached this stage you have become the subject-matter expert in your area or field. Depending on your level of education and work experience, you may even know a lot more than most professionals in your field. People seek you out for advice, wisdom, and expertise. This can be an exhilarating stage in your career, especially if you continue to seek challenges that leverage your knowledge. The potential for job stress is heightened in this stage because you are in demand and highly visible.

Slow Sink

Loss of Energy and Momentum

The Slow Sink Stage starts slowly and can go on for years. In this stage you no longer feel challenged, have lost interest or are no longer experiencing professional growth. You find yourself questioning your direction and purpose. Your creativity is sluggish. You become preoccupied with thoughts of what else you could be doing. It takes more energy than ever before to be 'on' at work. You have nagging conflicts between work and life commitments, and stress accumulates as you pull out the stops to get through day-to-day activities.

Remember Kevin, this is the stage that he found himself in after many years of success in sales. With the guidance of a career coach, Kevin returned to school to complete his degree in public accounting, and eventually ventured into a new career in the field of mergers and acquisitions.

Many people stay in 'slow sink' for an extended period of time for legitimate reasons. Some are afraid to take a financial risk to make a change; don't have a vision of what else to do; are fearful they may have to start at the bottom in a new career; or face the challenge of getting a new degree. More seasoned professionals often feel 'golden handcuffed' to their chosen profession because of financial considerations they stand to lose if they walk away prematurely. A significant change might not support the lifestyle they have created for themselves and their families. Whatever the reason for procrastination, the longer this goes on, the more one becomes preoccupied with being stuck. If action is not taken in this stage, you run the risk of entering into the last and most unproductive stage of the Career Life Cycle - Bottom Out.

Bottom Out

Career Malaise has Set In

If you find yourself here it is likely that you are no longer able to completely mask your attitude about work. You sink into apathy and resignation. You feel stuck and your performance suffers as a result. You may have developed symptoms of depression such as fatigue, loss of focus, sleep disturbance, weight gain or weight loss. The stress you are feeling is taking a toll on your confidence, your relationships at work or at home, and may even be detrimental to your physical health. You are career fatigued.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR DESTINY

So how do you make the most of the stage you are in and take control of your career? For starters use the GUIDE below. It conveniently outlines career management strategies for both the developing professional and those who are more established in the world of work. *Developing professionals* are individuals typically in their twenties to early thirties who have just started to launch their careers. *Established professionals* are individuals who have provable resumes and can demonstrate a track record of career experience and technical or industry knowledge.

A CAREER GUIDE

HONEYMOON

Developing professional: What do I need to do/learn now?

- Skills are easy to forget once you have mastered them, so keep an inventory of the skills you are developing.
- Update your resume annually. Start a 'resume archive' to keep track of the experience and accomplishments that you are accumulating. Provide numbers, dollar amounts, and percentages to quantify your accomplishments.
- Take on short-term projects that challenge you to develop new skills. Focus on delivering quality work product.

Established professional: What skills/expertise should I capitalize on?

- Deepen self-awareness of the particular strengths and skills that make you stand out from everybody else.
- Do you have habits or personal strategies that are unproductive and that you need to let go?
- Develop a vision of what you want to achieve over the next 18 months.
- Think of ways to keep your work exciting by identifying potential opportunities, broadening professional and industry networks, and assuming new challenges.

MAINTENANCE

Developing professional: Where can I go from here?

- Complete a professional assessment of your skills, interests and personality attributes.
- Learn skills to deal with conflict and ambiguity. Look at change as opportunity.
- Expand basic business skills in computing, writing, presenting, and decision making.
- Broaden your horizons. Challenge yourself to move outside of your comfort zone by taking on projects that could lead to future opportunities. Find a mentor.

Established professional: Where do I go from here? How can I expand my reputation and visibility?

- Identify distinguishing qualities that define you as a manager, leader and industry professional, e.g., resourcefulness, ingenuity, and resilience. Take an objective look at yourself through a 360° survey or professional assessment process. Identify gaps and 'blind spots.'
- Create opportunities to self promote and become more visible. Develop a personal strategic career plan. Define potential career moves, weigh the consequences of each, and decide where you want to focus your career energy. Integrate short term (12-24 months) and long term (3 to 5 years) assignments into your plan.
- Develop balance across the three primary competency measures - technical/analytical; interpersonal; emotional.
- Develop your coaching skills and coach others. Volunteer for cross-functional assignments.

GURU

Developing professional: How can I leverage what I have?

- Inventory your successes, both professional and personal. Identify what you did that contributed to your success. Explore other assignments or responsibilities that would

benefit from the expertise you offer.

- Develop expertise across the three primary competency measures- technical/analytical; interpersonal and emotional.
- Know your flaws. How would people that know you at your best and worst describe you? Develop resiliency; a critical attribute that helps you bounce back when faced with adversity or set back.

Established professional: What do I want my legacy to be?

- Develop perspective of the impact you have had on the people, organizations and industries where you have worked. Write a profile of your greatest successes and achievements. Imagine your epitaph - what do you want to be remembered for.
- Revisit your strategic career plan. Are you where you expected to be? Do you have unfinished career business, e.g., a degree you have always wanted to get, non-profit work you would enjoy?
- Explore other industry venues where you can apply your range of expertise.
- Become a mentor in your world of work or community.
- Transfer your knowledge through teaching or public speaking.
- Assume a leadership role in a professional association.

SLOW SINK

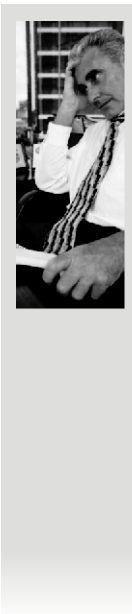
Developing professional: What is important to me? Where am I headed?

- Seek feedback from those who know you well.
- Advance your learning by returning to school or enrolling in professional development programs.
- Experiment by changing your routine.
- Assess the work values that have meaning and purpose for you. Has there been a shift in what is important to you? (see insert on Values)
- Engage a career coach to help you assess whether a job or career change would be in your best interest.
- Review your resume file. Note progress and accomplishments. Explore new possibilities. Revise short and long term goals.

Established professional: What is most important to me?

- Find activities that will re-charge you, e.g., engage in an interest or hobby outside of your profession; take a break, vacation or sabbatical; make time to experience some culture, nature or adventure; experiment with changing your routine.
- Take a broad view of all your successes and accomplishments. Re-assess your values to see what has changed in priority for you. Distinguish between your personal self and your professional self.
- Go back to the strategic plan you developed for your career. Assess where you are stuck. Take control by setting new goals which will mobilize you to action.
- Network your ideas.





BOTTOM OUT

Any Professional who reaches this stage: How do I get out of this mess? What are my options?

- Acknowledge that you have bottomed out and adopt a hopeful stance. Recognize that this is a normal phase in the Career Life Cycle.
- Understand that without distress, there is often no incentive to change.
- Focus on opportunities and problem solving rather than on worry or regret.
- Take control! Accept responsibility for your career. Create a short-term plan with reachable goals.
- Have a professional resume ready. Circulate your resume. Network and take an active role in professional groups. Develop a support list, contact each person, and tell them about your intentions.
- Engage a coach or mentor for support.
- Maintain a productive level at work so that you do not derail your reputation and job standing.
- Establish a nurturing place where you can go to reflect and recharge your psychological and emotional reserves. Do whatever it takes to maintain equilibrium and keep your spirits up.

MANAGE YOUR CAREER

Managing career is an intellectual, psychological and emotional endeavor. To stay in control of your career destiny, you need to actively monitor your progress and stay in tune with your attitude. Use the Career Guide. Check in annually. Identify where you are and what you can do to prepare for the next stage, and to avoid bottoming out. Individuals who work with the flow of the Career Life Cycle are better positioned to control their path and seize those opportunities that are personally and professionally fulfilling.

Stop for a moment and think about what FRIDAY evening is like for you? Does a sense of accomplishment override any weariness you feel from the week? Or are you drained and exhausted, more than ready to escape the ordeals of work? Could you be career fatigued?

WORKPLACE VALUES are social principles, goals or standards which are very important to you in the world of work. What are the 5 workplace values that are most important to you today? What are the 5 workplace values that are most important to you as you look to the future?

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| Advancement | Mental stimulation |
| Adventure | Moral fulfillment |
| Affiliation | Personal growth |
| Challenge | Physical challenge |
| Competence | Power |
| Competition | Precision work |
| Creativity | Pressure |
| Decision making | Prestige |
| Environment | Recognition |
| Excitement | Security |
| Fast pace | Service to others |
| Friendships | Stability |
| Helping society | Status |
| High earnings | Supervision of others |
| Independence | Time flexibility |
| Influencing people | Variety |
| Intellectual status | Work alone |
| Interest | Work with others |
| Leadership | Work/Life Balance |