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Beating Boredom on the Job

By Ilya Leybovich

Even the most exciting jobs can have slow days, but that doesn't mean you should resign yourself to long stretches of dullness. Here we look at ways to fight off boredom on the clock.

Regardless of your profession, there are bound to be times when you're bored at work. Whether the assignment you have is particularly dull, or if there's nothing to do at all, boredom can put a cramp on job satisfaction. But temporary bouts of boredom can also extend into long-term [employee disengagement](#), which is harmful to a company and your career. Luckily, there are steps that can be taken to make workplace boredom an avoidable affliction.

"Boredom is one of the biggest contributors to work-related stress, even in these times of economic downturn and career uncertainties," business psychologist Douglas LaBier writes at professional development blog [Progressive Impact](#). "The less someone works at work, the more internal agony they feel. Up to 70 percent of all illness is rooted in stress, and much of that is workplace related, resulting in \$300 billion in lost revenue, and 200 million in lost workdays."

Work-related boredom can be detrimental to both the employee and the employer because it is often linked to demoralization and a lack of energy in the workplace. This can lead to a culture of apathy and put a severe constraint on creativity, undercutting a company's chances to remain competitive in the marketplace.

In addition to hurting business, the negative effects caused by prolonged periods of boredom can also seep into someone's personal life. This problem is especially evident among those with adventurous personalities who become bored more easily and have a difficult time working through even temporarily dull situations.

"For most people, boredom is a passing, nearly trivial feeling that lifts as soon as your number is called, a task is completed or a lecture ends," [Scientific American](#) explains. "But boredom has a darker side: Easily bored people are at higher risk for depression, anxiety, drug addiction, alcoholism, compulsive gambling, eating disorders, hostility, anger, poor social skills, bad grades and low work performance."

The first step to fighting boredom in the workplace is identifying its sources. According to business polling firm [Sirota Survey Intelligence](#), employees who report being bored are often doing work for which they are ill-suited or have job requirements that are poorly designed. As a result, they have very low job satisfaction, little sense of accomplishment and lack pride in their company. In fact, bored workers tend to be more disgruntled than [overworked ones](#).

"Those who are saying their workload is heavier rather than lighter are more positive," Jeffrey M. Saltzman, chief executive of Sirota, told the [Washington Post](#). "When you say you have too much work to do, other things are happening in your head: 'I'm valued by the organization. They're giving me responsibility.' That's better than being in the other place where you say I'm not of value in this

place."

Apart from broader organizational problems that can lead to endemic boredom, there are several measures employees can take themselves to help deal with their boredom. [Monster.com](#) offers the following tips to help re-energize workers:

- **Find a new way to work.** If you're tired of the same old meetings, assignments and other tedious tasks, try to change how things are done at work. Talk to your boss or colleagues about changing settings for meetings or switching between duties to keep things interesting. If you're most bored at a specific time of day, try to do your preferred tasks at that time, and if you mostly communicate via e-mail, make an effort to have more face-to-face interactions.
- **Switch seats.** While it may sound trivial, relocating to a new desk, office or workspace can provide a fresh perspective on the daily grind. Even swapping places with a coworker can be enough to spark a new outlook on your environment.
- **Change your commute.** The way you arrive at and leave from your workplace can be as important to your attitude as the work itself. Consider a new mode of transportation for your commute: take the subway or a bike, carpool with a friend or change the route you take between home and the office to escape the same old routine.
- **Set a goal and achieve it.** Not feeling like you're working toward something is a sure way to become bored. Determine a specific goal and set a deadline for it to instill a more tangible sense of progress in your day-to-day work. These goals don't have to be huge as long as you can muster enthusiasm to pursue them.

If every attempt to dissipate your boredom fails, it may be a sign that more drastic steps need to be taken to revitalize your career. While [changing jobs](#) is the most direct solution, finding opportunities within your current company can also be a fruitful (and less risky) way to deal with the doldrums.

"If you're bored maybe it's time to check for a higher position within the company. Ask your supervisor if you can interview or job-shadow the next level on your career track," [ABC News](#) advises. "You could also interview or shadow positions in other departments. Prowl for committees or task forces that you can join. Prowl, creatively. Change your job, instead of changing jobs."

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Resources

[Three Kinds of Boredom at Work](#)

by Douglas LaBier

Progressive Impact, Jan. 28, 2010

[Bored to Death: Chronically Bored People Exhibit Higher Risk-Taking Behavior](#)

by Anna Gosline

Scientific American, Feb. 26, 2007

[Bored Employees are More Disgruntled than Overworked Ones, Research Finds](#)

Sirota Survey Intelligence, Jan. 30, 2008

[Boredom Numbs the Work World](#)

by Amy Joyce

Washington Post, Aug. 10, 2005

[Four Ways to Overcome Boredom at Work](#)

by Caroline Levchuck

Monster.com, 2010

[Working Wounded: Wake up! Tips to Fight Boredom at Work](#)

by Bob Rosner

ABC News, Jan. 25, 2008

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