

The Importance of Job Satisfaction

Your personality, your likes and dislikes, all come into play. Advice on what to do to make good career decisions

Before graduation, Martha Bowen was in the fortunate position of having three job offers from consulting firms. She accepted the most prestigious firm's offer and she's not happy. It was clear from day one that her free-wheeling style and bubbly personality were at odds with the company's staid posture. The carpeting was gray, people wore gray suits, and she felt like she was living in a black-and-white movie.

One of the offers she turned down was from a smaller, less formal firm that she liked, but her parents and friends told her she "couldn't turn down" the larger, better-known firm. It was, they said, "The chance of a lifetime, and look at the money!"

Burt Walker went with a Big Eight firm because his accounting professors said, "You'll never forgive yourself if you don't." He's unlikely to forgive himself anyway because he's not doing well. Burt is overwhelmed by the size and scale of every audit he's assigned. He hates the extensive travel and his boss, the product of a private college, seems to think Burt's state university education is a handicap to be overcome.

Earl Williams, who grew up on Chicago's South Side, took a job in a remote area of northern California. The job was a fine opportunity and the community was reputed to be a nature lover's paradise. Once he settled there, however, Earl missed Chicago far more than he'd anticipated. He was one of only 10 minorities in the company

and one of fewer than 50 in the town. The locally popular Mexican cuisine was not soul food.

With the best intentions, all these people made mistakes in choosing a first job that might have been avoided. They listened to parents, friends, and

teachers whose advice was well-intentioned but disastrous. After all, more experienced professors, placement professionals, and friends were trying to help. But they blocked out the negative messages from their intuitions and made what appeared to be rational choices. Unfortunately, by being logical and unemotional, they found themselves in jobs they should have rejected. They should not have ignored their feelings and doubts, because what we sometimes call intuition is often a rational response to our past experiences.

Martha refused to acknowledge the importance of her style and effervescent personality even though after she'd taken the office tour during the interviewing process, she told her roommate it was "drab" and "stuffy."

A friend of Burt's had gone to work two years before for the same accounting firm he'd chosen. She had left after 18 months, claiming she'd never been happy a day there.

Earl's parents didn't want to throw cold water on his romantic notions about living near the mountains and redwoods, but his mother did remind him that his one experience at a wilderness scout camp had been so disagreeable that he'd begged to come home after one week.

Remember, if you hate your first job, even if you perform well, it's going to be an ego-rattling disappointment. It can also undermine your self-confidence. Every job you have between the first one and retirement may not be



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Features

or even effectively suppressed. They can change in response to new data. They should alert you to the need for further investigation.

Virtually every job seeker who made a wrong choice will admit that part of the problem was that he or she rode roughshod over feelings that were honest and important. Admitting that they'd done so when it was too late made them feel even more distressed when the job failed to be satisfying.

A firm's name and reputation have



little effect on job satisfaction. Of course, drawing a "Wow, you work for IBM!" from friends may be pleasant, but what if IBM's style—and it has a very definite style—makes you miserable? Do you think being miserable at IBM or Arthur Andersen would be less miserable than being at the Mighty Mouse Computer Co.?

Miserable is miserable—no matter whose name is on the brass plate. Telling yourself you can "stand anything for a year so I can put it on my resume" is foolish. Wouldn't satisfying, developmental, successful experiences almost anywhere look as good? Prestige and job satisfaction rarely compute if the rest of the work situation isn't positive.

Ultimately, your work satisfaction will depend on a combination of circumstances, some of which are within your control. The more care you take as you go through the screening process, the better off you'll be in the long run. Your own feelings and experiences are the only definitive ones, and have the most to do with how satisfied and successful you'll be once you're on the job. ■

For Additional Information

Thank God it's Monday! by William E. Diehl. Fortress Press. 192 pages; \$5.95, paperback.

Thank God it's Monday: How to Turn Work into an Adventure by Robert M. Randolph. Institute for Business Planning Inc. 249 pages; \$15.95.