



LEAD

article issue # 16

## The Mid-Career Crisis: Don't Fight It, Feel It

If you've come to absolutely dread Monday morning, you may be having a mid-career crisis. Like the mid-life crisis, the mid-career crisis comes from being unfulfilled and unhappy in your situation, and it's more common than you'd think. For some people, excessive work and poor pay are the root causes, while for others the problems are lack of motivation and challenge. Whatever the cause, the key to surviving the mid-career crisis is embracing it and taking it as a sign that you need to make some fundamental changes. When you see it this way, your career dilemma can actually become a force of change for the good.

### How Did I Get Here?

When we chose a career, we often do so from an uninformed position of inexperience. Sometimes parental or societal pressures factor into our decisions more than they should. People change, and over time things that previously seemed important become less so. And in a society where we are repeatedly told that the things that matter the most are money, power and status, the idea of finding fulfilling work often gets lost. So it should come as no surprise that after years in their chosen field, many people realize that their jobs are making them miserable.

### What Not to Do

It is easy to make excuses for avoiding change. People think that it will be too disruptive, might lower their standard of living or simply be worse than the current situation. That kind of thinking will keep you stuck where you are, and ignoring the problem won't make it disappear.

You've also got to guard against being preoccupied with your age. Some people get hit with the mid-career crisis in their 30s, while others avoid it until well into their 50s. There is no too young or too old when it comes to career dilemmas.

### Nail It Down

Getting through a mid-career crisis successfully hinges on identifying exactly what the problem is, and what it isn't. You need to determine what is making you unhappy with work, and then imagine what it would be like to work somewhere where these problems weren't present. Once you've done that, determine what it is that makes you happy, both in life and work. It could be exercising your creative side, improving your physical fitness, the outdoors, spending time with family or simply having more time to stop and smell the roses.

Ideally then, what you are looking for is a situation that will give you less (or none) of the things that make you unhappy at your current job, while letting you do more of things you like, both at work and at home. Many people going through this exercise discover things about themselves that they may not have realized. Often we become overly focused on one thing, when we are in fact more multi-dimensional, something that needs to be explored and expressed in our careers.

### Options

While a complete career change is often the solution to a career crisis, be open to the possibility that the problem may not be so much what you do but where you do it. Here are some solutions to common complaints that may help you remain in your current field:

- **Underappreciated** - If your employer doesn't recognize what you bring to the table, consider becoming a freelance contractor or consultant.
- **More time with family** - Consider working from home, telecommuting one or two days a week, or make the case for "flex time." Employers often see the benefit in these arrangements if you can demonstrate that it makes you more productive.
- **Negative work environment** - Look around for another organization where you can perform your role in an environment better suited to your work habits and style.

You may want to consider addressing the situation directly with your supervisor or HR department, but be discreet and try not to sound completely dissatisfied. They may be able to offer options to help you grow in your current role, and many organizations have programs that allow you to move laterally or expand your current responsibilities so that you can feel challenged again.

### Know When It's Time to Go

Leaving your job is never an easy decision to make, but if you've tried everything and still find yourself constantly bogged down in a negative space over your job, you need to move on. Even though you may be very good at what you do, it doesn't necessarily mean that you will be happy doing it. So if you find yourself in a mid-career crisis, see it as an opportunity to make a change in your life that is more in line with who you really are. Take a good look at what it is you need from work, and go out and find that. When you find a job that is fulfilling and satisfying, your quality of life will improve dramatically. You still may not like Monday mornings, but at least you'll be free of the constant feeling that you are in the wrong job!