

Want to quit your job but can't right now? How to cope while you plan next steps

Schnalzer, Rachel; Masunaga, Samantha . Los Angeles Times (Online) , Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Communications LLC. Nov 17, 2021.

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FULL TEXT

For workers who can't quit their jobs, the so-called Great Resignation may feel like a farce.

There are myriad reasons that employees who might want to leave their jobs cannot do so —financial obligations, healthcare benefits or a fear of the unknown. But that doesn't necessarily make the desire to leave any less acute. Career transitions are rarely seamless, says Octavia Goredema, career coach and the founder of Twenty Ten Agency, a career coaching company. But what you do today won't define you forever.

"Your current situation is a steppingstone to something better," she said. "You might not be able to see or reach for it right now, but trust that it's there."

Read on for more tips on how to make your current working situation more bearable —maybe even more fruitful —and also to prepare for an eventual departure from your job.

Understand why you want to quit

Spend some time reflecting on what isn't working for you in your current job, Goredema said. Is it the work environment or your role? Do you not feel valued at the organization?

It's important to "understand what your triggers are," said Denise Pinkett, head of people at HUM Nutrition, a vitamin and supplement company. For example, if you wake up dreading the workday, "dig into that feeling," she said. Pinkett advises asking yourself whether it's the work itself or the people you work with that are contributing to your unhappiness or frustration at work.

Perks like never before: Employers are bending over backward to keep you from quitting

A \$100,000 signing bonus for a veterinarian? COVID has changed American work life, with employees asking for more, and employers obliging.

Then think about what attracted you to the job in the first place, and what could make your situation better in the short term. Taking initiative can help. Consider asking if you can attend a meeting that you usually wouldn't, or helping out on a project that aligns more with your interests.

"If you don't articulate some of the things that you're motivated by in a positive way, people never know," Goredema said. "Doors might start to open that you might have never known were there."

Write down your wins

Keep a list of your short-term accomplishments to recognize what you have achieved —and so it is easy to pull up when you are negotiating for higher pay or a different role with your current employer, as well as in future job interviews. It can range from finishing a big project to getting your to-do list done. That helps you see that you're making progress where you are, which is especially important if you're feeling stuck, Goredema said.

It also helps validate your work, which is important even if your employer isn't recognizing that.

Speak to your manager

Once you reflect on why you feel unfulfilled or unhappy with your work situation, it's important to let your manager know, career experts say.

"If you do not say something, there's no way for them to know," said Sertrice Grice, chief consulting officer and co-

founder of Mattingly Solutions, a consulting firm focused on diversity, equity and inclusion. “They’re not a mind reader.”

Mabel Frías had a conversation with her boss six months before she left her dream job at Savage X Fenty, a lingerie brand founded by singer Rihanna, to tell them about a side project she’d been working on. Today that project is her full-time job –Luna Magic, a beauty and lifestyle company she co-founded with her sister. Her boss was supportive during that initial conversation, and today, they’re still one of her biggest supporters, she said. “People have to be really honest with themselves,” Frías said.

Instead of simply telling your manager that you’re unfulfilled, it’s important to articulate what precisely is making you unhappy. Grice suggests statements such as, “I’m not happy because X, Y, and Z. What are some options for me to do better here?” and “I like working here, I just want to find a way to be a bit more satisfied.”

Pent-up demand, pandemic savings, back-to-office mandates – experts say it will all add up to a historic wave of people leaving their jobs.

And don’t make it seem like you have one foot out the door.

“If they think you’re a flight risk, they may start looking to replace you,” said Pinkett of HUM Nutrition. Rather, focus on being “a little more transparent about what you need to feel fulfilled.”

If your direct manager is part of the problem, you can either go to their manager or your “dotted line manager,” such as another leader you report to for certain projects, Grice said. She recommends using language such as: “I do not feel comfortable working under [your current manager]. I would really like it if there’s a way for me to get a new assignment. I know these things take time, but I wanted to bring it to your attention.”

“It’s OK to have these conversations,” Grice said. “If that conversation doesn’t go well, or if you don’t feel comfortable, just because of the culture of the organization you’re in, figure out how you can get out.” Setting aside money is a good first step –more on that below.

And make sure to leave the meeting with actionable next steps, such as a plan to meet again in a few weeks, experts say.

Try to negotiate a higher salary

Today’s competitive labor market means employers might be offering higher salaries to attract new hires. It’s not unreasonable for current employees to ask for a raise to match the compensation of those new employees, said Blake Ashforth, a professor at Arizona State University who focuses on management.

But don’t overplay your hand and make sure you have your facts together before you talk to your boss. Research the approximate salary for your job in your industry and area. Sites such as Glassdoor often list company salaries or other pay data, or you can connect with trusted colleagues in the industry to get a feel for pay ranges.

This also applies if you’re now doing two jobs because a co-worker left, said Lazetta Rainey Braxton, co-chief executive at 2050 Wealth Partners, a virtual financial planning and wealth management firm. Make sure to negotiate with your boss to get paid for your additional responsibilities.

Save up

If you’re planning to leave your job, you’ll want to build your savings in case you don’t have another role lined up. Make what Braxton calls a “lifestyle plan” and determine the monthly cost of running your household. That budget should take into account things like how long it might take you to find a new job, time off between your old and new jobs and if you want to relocate.

“Quantify your time horizons,” she said.

A good goal to work toward is saving six months’ worth of expenses, said certified financial planner Brittney Castro. Depending on your risk tolerance, you may feel comfortable setting aside only three or four months’ worth. To build your savings, Castro recommends setting up auto-savings to put money aside from each paycheck as you work toward your goal. She also recommends reviewing your budget to see if you can eliminate any expenses, in this transition period, as you save up.

Review your current benefits

It’s important to consider the value of your health insurance, 401(k) plan and any other benefits your current

company offers when planning for an eventual job transition, Castro said.

These are important benefits to consider when applying for new roles. If other companies don't offer the same level of benefits, it may be a good idea to negotiate for a higher salary, Castro said.

If you leave without moving immediately to another job, you should have money set aside for COBRA health insurance, a federally administered program that allows workers to remain on their employer-sponsored health insurance plan in certain circumstances. Cash out any paid time off or sick leave you may be entitled to.

Don't wait until you're debt-free

You don't need to pay off all of your debt before leaving a role that isn't working for you, Castro said. Instead, find a balance between paying off debt and building your savings.

If you need help balancing priorities, it may be a good idea to work with an affordable financial planner who charges by the hour to figure out a plan, Castro said. She suggests checking the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards' website to find a planner who could work for you.

Network, internally and externally

Speaking with people in your desired industry is a good way to use your time while in an unfulfilling role.

Depending on the shift you're hoping to make, it could make sense to start with people at your workplace.

The pandemic has spurred a wave of women's entrepreneurship, especially among women who had never before started a business.

"Network with people internally in different departments. ... Get to know them, and let them know your interest," said Grice of Mattingly Solutions. "When opportunities and projects come up, they're more likely to think of you."

Don't worry about job hopping

If you feel like you're going nowhere at your current workplace, don't let the fear of being considered a "job hopper" keep you from taking steps to leave.

"We're in a pandemic. Take nothing for granted," said Pinkett of HUM Nutrition. "Live your life the way you would like to and design the life that you love."

Build skills

Be proactive about finding new projects in your current workplace that you can work on. That could impress your boss, open up new possibilities for you, and also give you experience that will look good on your resume for future job searches, said Ashforth of ASU.

"The intrinsic stuff really does matter," he said. "We tend to forget the job itself matters in terms of giving you the knowledge, skills and abilities you need down the road."

Don't forget life outside work

If you're feeling stuck in an unfulfilling role, it can help to focus on your personal life.

"You are more than your job," Grice said. "Taking time to hang out with your friends, making time to work out, making sure you're not skipping meals ... can really help a bad situation."

Boundaries between work and everything else become especially important at this time. Grice advises finding ways to truly disconnect when not at work.

A good first step? Take a walk immediately after work to establish a break between your personal and professional lives.

DETAILS

Subject: Financial planners; Careers; Employers; Managers; Planning; Employees; Employment; Pandemics; Wages &salaries; Health insurance

Business indexing term: Subject: Careers Employers Employees Employment Wages &salaries Health insurance

Publication title:	Los Angeles Times (Online); Los Angeles
Publication year:	2021
Publication date:	Nov 17, 2021
Section:	Business
Publisher:	Los Angeles Times Communications LLC
Place of publication:	Los Angeles
Country of publication:	United States, Los Angeles
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States
Source type:	Blog, Podcast, or Website
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	2598106141
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/want-quit-your-job-cant-right-now-how-cope-while/docview/2598106141/se-2?accountid=44910
Copyright:	Copyright Los Angeles Times Communications LLC Nov 17, 2021
Last updated:	2021-11-19
Database:	U.S. Major Dailies

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