

## Are You On a Career Treadmill? 3 Questions to Refresh a Stale Career



In our work with professionals, we have found that many feel like they are on a career treadmill – they are working hard and yet experiencing some combination of boredom and exhaustion without any sense that they are moving forward. Often, they end up disengaged and going through the motions at work. Nobody wins when on the career treadmill – the employee’s disengagement negatively impacts every aspect of their life, and companies miss out on the ideas and productivity of a more engaged

workforce.

When you are on the career treadmill, below are three proven methods to step out, take control and re-energize your career. I encourage you to take some time to answer the question associated with each method.

### **Commit to Doing What You Love**

What work do you want to do? For many of us this is not an easy question. In our coaching with professionals, we have found that many are conditioned to be a good company man or woman and do what they are asked to do. They have not been asked to explore the very basic question:

*What work do you love to do?*

In answering this question, think of the times you were happiest in your career. What were you doing when you found a sense of joy and engagement at work? What are your unique core needs that must be met for you to really be happy with your work?

Answering this can have a profound impact. Such was the case with a Supply Chain Director we will call Patrick. Patrick had been on a career treadmill for some time and was increasingly finding work a grind. He found himself day dreaming of his next vacation, and feeling emotionally down on Sunday evenings when he realized that he had a new week at work starting the next day.

In working with a coach, Patrick realized that he most enjoyed roles in which he could apply his analytical skills and solve difficult problems. He loves uncovering new insights and building something new. Unfortunately, in taking the current role two years previous, Patrick assumed a much larger group with mature processes. He was given the directive by his manager, and the head of the business, to maintain performance and not “disturb” things or create any change. Patrick’s need to apply deep analytical insight and develop new things were not being met.

With the new insight, Patrick was able to delegate some routine tasks and involve himself in positioning some more interesting opportunities, and get included on a corporate committee tasked with rethinking the full go-to-market strategy. He also had a thoughtful conversation with his manager, and his manager's manager, about future roles in which he can add the most value.

Since this epiphany 3 years ago, Patrick has stayed off the career treadmill, and the company has benefited exponentially.

### **Comprehend Your Impact**

One need we all have is meaning. We need to know that our work is important at some level to someone. As Victor Frankel stated in his seminal book *Man's Search for Meaning*, "if you know the 'why' you can endure any 'how'." To fully engage in the hours you spend at work, you need to be able to answer the question:

*Why is my work important?*

In answering this question, consider the people that would be impacted if you didn't perform your job well, or perform it at all. Who needs you to perform your role well?

After 15 years as a tax professional with seven of those years as a Manager, Beth was feeling the effects of being on the Career Treadmill. Many days she felt she was going through the motions as she had lost the enthusiasm for the work and opportunities in her company. She became more focused on the pay check and a desire for stability in her career, and was less motivated to improve and realize stretch results. Beth was not living up to her potential, and neither was her team.

When prompted to consider the importance and impact of her work, Beth was reminded of the reassurance that she and her team provided to over a thousand families on an annual basis. When they do their job well, Beth and her team help people finance their education, retire to spend time with their family, and manage through financial stressors of all types. When reminded of the human impact of her work, this reframed and refreshed Beth's motivation. This had a tangible impact on how she managed, and the quality of service her team provided.

### **Develop Key Relationships**

We may love our work and see the importance of our role, but the workplace can still be a challenge if we don't like who we work with. The frustration we feel when we have a lack of trust, respect and/or alignment with the people we work with can make the workplace a daily nightmare.

Relationships and a robust network can surface opportunities and facilitate high performance, or they can create abrasion and erode performance. You have to manage relationships effectively to get off the treadmill and own your career happiness. This requires you to ask the question:

*Who do I need to build stronger working relationships with?*

When creating the list, there will likely be people who you are challenged to work with effectively. These are people that you may argue with and/or assertively avoid. Inversely, in creating the list there will likely be people who you do not have disagreements with but who are key stakeholders who you need to have a stronger business relationships with.

If you are struggling with a relationship, realize that the relationship challenge is caused by unmet expectations – one or both of you are disappointed in the other. To overcome the relationship challenge, or to simply build more influence with a key stakeholder, it can be profoundly helpful to try to understand their vantage point by taking time to fully consider their stressors, aspirations and preferred way of interacting. Then ask yourself, *how can I be a solution to this person?* Trying to “walk in their shoes” provides you with the information you need to adjust, empathize and repair/build relationships.

Spending the time to empathize with your detractors, and engage with your key stakeholders, will take you off the career treadmill and open up unique insights and possibilities.

*About the Author: Joe Frodsham is President of Career Management Partners. Joe and his firm coach executives and consult with organizations on performance, talent development and career issues. For more information on career engagement, see [www.careermp.com](http://www.careermp.com)*