

IS YOUR JOB TOXIC?

Does the sight of your boss's name in your inbox bring you out in hives? Or is your Monday morning mantra some iteration of 'same shit, different week'? Whether it's fear, stress or sheer boredom that's turned your working day into a living nightmare, we've recruited the experts to help you navigate the trickiest occupational hazards



MY BOSS IS SO MEAN

THE SITUATION

You're not going to get praise from your manager all the time – they're meant to guide you with constructive criticism, after all. But if you feel as though they have a personal axe to grind and you can't seem to do *anything* right, this can be crushing to experience.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Take a deep breath, as this won't go away on its own. But how you handle it depends on the situation. 'There's no hard and fast rule,' says Rachel Suff, senior policy advisor at the CIPD, the professional body for HR. 'If an incident is relatively minor, some people may want to raise it directly. If you feel you're being bullied, you may want to make it more formal.' Dealing with it by yourself? Try to be as non-confrontational as possible. Say something like, 'I want to have a good working relationship with you but I have the sense that you might not be happy with my work. Can you let me know where I'm going wrong?' Then, together, put a plan in place for how you can improve. If you think it borders on bullying, you could ask an HR representative or another manager to have a quiet word. HR raising the issue could be enough. While you may never be best friends, it's your boss's duty to stay professional. Take comfort in the fact that your HR department or another manager will be trained in dealing with this kind of situation.

How was your working day? Was it fine, or was it so gut-wrenchingly awful that you're not sure how you'll get through another one, let alone your notice period? Being stuck in a toxic job can knock your confidence and make you feel like there's no end in sight. 'Work is a breeding ground for bad behaviour because any situation with more than one person involved has potential for conflict,' says careers coach Karen Kwong. 'Add egos and pride to the mix, and that dynamic is amped up.' So, how should you handle those anxiety-inducing situations? We asked the experts.



THERE'S NO OPPORTUNITY FOR PROGRESSION

THE SITUATION

There's nothing more frustrating than being stuck in what feels like a dead end at work – whether you've been told that you're not ready for a more senior role or a colleague has been promoted ahead of you. Or it could be that – no matter how good you are – there's simply nowhere for you to go.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Has a colleague pipped you to the post? Or have you been told you're not quite ready yet? Time to bring in the F word: feedback. 'Ask for honest examples where you've shown apparent ineptitude and when,' says careers coach Karin Peeters. 'It might be hard to hear, but this will give you the opportunity to improve. Then, work together on a plan of action to help you get to where you need to be. Is there any training that they can provide? Be proactive, be mature and grow from this experience – and then prove them wrong.' If there simply isn't the opportunity to progress within your workplace – for example, if jobs are being cut or you've reached a ceiling – then it might be time to take the nudge to move on in good faith and start looking for roles elsewhere. Love your company? See what's happening in other departments – there might be a sideways move you can make internally that will allow you to feel more challenged and flourish.

MY WORKLOAD HAS DOUBLED SINCE MARCH

THE SITUATION

Half your company's staff have been furloughed or laid off since the start of lockdown, so you're picking up the slack. It's enough to transform even the most cherished of jobs into a breeding ground for burnout.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

This 'new normal' is so discomfobulating because it's new to everyone – your boss included, and they're likely unaware of how overloaded you are. 'Some of my clients have ended up with two or three times their previous workloads,' says executive coach Susy Roberts, founder of consultancy firm Hunter Roberts. 'This clearly isn't sustainable, so it's important to be assertive and speak up if you're struggling.' To help your manager help you, Roberts advises sharing a log of your weekly hours (remember, no matter how much your boss cares about your feelings, they'll need this data to argue to *their* boss that your load needs lightening) and asking for their help with prioritisation. 'Thinking about what is really urgent and what can be put on the back burner for now will really help to make things feel more manageable,' she tells *WH*. And don't let the 'lucky to be employed' guilt hold you back from speaking up. Doing so could be the catalyst for broader changes taking place within your team or organisation that ultimately make your colleagues' working lives happier, too.

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A COLLEAGUE IS SEXUALLY HARASSING ME

THE SITUATION

If you feel at all uncomfortable, then trust that feeling – even if the other person seems to have no idea that what they're doing is wrong. 'Sexual harassment at work covers a very wide spectrum of behaviour, from verbal comments to offensive jokes and unwanted attention or touching – including what some people may write off as "banter",' says Suff.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

There are many support options out there, and the key thing is speaking up. Keep a detailed diary of inappropriate remarks and incidents as evidence that you can refer back to when making a formal or informal complaint. 'If speaking to the person face to face feels too uncomfortable, go to a trusted manager or someone from HR,' says Suff. 'Trust your instincts and decide who to approach to discuss the issue.' She recommends confiding in a senior colleague who can help and advise you. If you want to remain anonymous, HR can issue a communication to all staff, reminding them of what isn't appropriate, which may be a wake-up call to the person concerned. If you're worried that HR isn't taking the matter seriously enough, make it clear that you're prepared to submit a formal grievance, as employers who fail to follow the correct process can face additional financial penalties at any subsequent employment tribunal. It might feel like you're drawing unwanted attention to yourself, but you'll be helping to stop the same thing happening to others in the future. You can also contact organisations such as Citizens Advice and Acas for more help with sexual harassment. The same advice stands if you're feeling discriminated against for your race, religion, sexuality or gender identity – speak up.

MY CLIQUEY COLLEAGUES DON'T INCLUDE ME

THE SITUATION

Finding out via Instagram that half your team were at the pub without you was one thing. But not to invite you to the Friday night Zoom call? Really?

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

First, think about what you really want from work pals before calling them out. 'What's hurting you most? Deep down, you might not even want to be part of their "tribe", but would just like to feel as though you have friends at work,' says Peeters. 'Socialise with people who *do* appreciate you. Look around your workplace – is there anyone else who you work with who isn't part of the clique either? Having one friend in the workplace will make a huge difference.' Once you start going for lunchtime walks and find out that you hit it off or have stuff in common, you'll begin to care less about the others. Working remotely? While it's harder to forge new social connections, it's not impossible. A company-wide Zoom quiz or even a training session can become an opportunity to socialise with different people in your business. But if you feel the exclusion is bordering on bullying behaviour, speak to HR or your line manager.

OPEN ALL HOURS

Our guide to clocking off if your workplace's 'always on' culture is harming your mental health



FIND YOUR CORRIDOR

Shutting down on time, then checking your emails over Netflix? Make use of 'corridor' activities, as psychologist Professor Gail Kinman calls them, to separate work from home. Just going for a walk can clear your mind.



DON'T SWITCH IT UP

Multitasking? Not all it's cracked up to be. Splitting your attention between multiple outlets can lose you up to 40% of your productivity. Try working through your to-do list one task at a time to keep working hours under control.



DO SOME DIGITAL HOUSEKEEPING

Ah, emails, the workaholic's crack. 'People spend a lot of time on emails that are neither important nor necessary, so turn off alerts and only check emails at certain points of the day,' advises Professor Kinman. Amen to that.



REWARD YOURSELF

Treat yourself for logging off on time. 'A good example is what you might spend the additional free time on,' says Professor Kinman. That might be trying a new recipe or just rewatching *Succession* while you wait for season three (thanks, Covid). **WH**