

RISKY BUSINESS

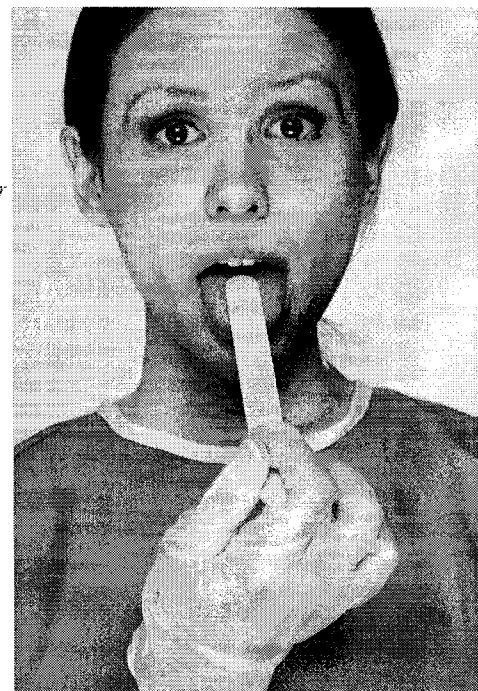
When Your Health Becomes Married to Your Job *By Gary Scholar*

WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD, you were asked many times, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I'm confident you never replied, "When I grow up I want to be unhappy and unhealthy in my job!"

Yet, the sad reality is that many women are stuck in a dysfunctional job that negatively impacts their emotional and physical health. This is like being in an unhealthy marriage that doesn't fit your values, needs, strengths or passions. Dysfunctional jobs are one of the leading causes of chronic emotional and physical health problems in the United States. That's because what your mind obsesses, your body expresses. When you're unhappy at work, it generates unhealthy levels of stress, which in turn affects your immune system and causes elevated levels of the stress hormone, Cortisol. Such stress can also lead to high anxiety, depression, weight gain, insomnia, digestive issues and a host of other chronic problems.

Research has shown that working mothers in dysfunctional jobs increase the stress levels of their children. In one study of 50 children, higher levels of Cortisol were found in children whose mothers reported job dissatisfaction than in those whose mothers had a high degree of job satisfaction. Plus, remaining in this type of work situation teaches children that it's OK to settle for being stressed out, unhappy and unhealthy *instead* of modeling for them the importance of loving what you do.

Divorcing yourself from a dysfunctional job may seem as difficult as a divorce from a long-term, unhealthy marriage. Here are four women who've felt stuck, at one time or another, in their careers and persevered to create a job that fits their needs.



NATALIE BARBER

Owner of Language, a stylish women's boutique

How did you know your job was dysfunctional?

It took me six long years to reach my dream job as an Equity Analyst. This is the job I wanted so badly and worked so hard to get. But I felt disengaged. It seemed I didn't have the same emotional attachment to my job as my colleagues. I was working 80 hours a week and the job wore me down. But, the one thing that got me through the day was sitting at my computer and going on a shopping list site. It was so pathetic but that was my nirvana!

What emotional or physical health issues did you experience?

I decided to go see my doctor. I told him I was exhausted, depressed, had high anxiety and could barely make it through the day. I said there's got to be something wrong with me because I work out regularly and eat healthy. He did several tests and everything came back normal.

He sat me down and the first question he asked me was, 'Do you like your job?' I broke down in tears and replied, 'Actually I

don't like my job.' My doctor told me he has seen many patients with jobs that created a negative impact on their health.

How did you transition into a job to fit your needs? It's scary to look at your life with all the hard work and realize you've been in the wrong career the whole time. I did a lot of soul searching.

When I made the decision to quit my job I felt immediate relief. Next, I decided to open up a clothing store—something I thought I'd never do. But at the end of the day I had to picture something I love to do.

How did it change your outlook?

A year later I feel great. The ironic thing is I still work 80 hours a week but now it's because I'm excited and passionate about what I do. I don't feel exhausted, depressed or like I'm treading water.

MAIA BIELAK

Clinical Massage Therapist

How did you know your job was dysfunctional?

I spent 10 years in real estate jobs that weren't rewarding for me. It didn't fit my value of making a difference

in people's lives. There was a lot of negativity within my working environment. I felt I had toxic bosses that made me feel worthless.

What emotional or physical health issues did you experience?

I struggled with my weight and gained 35 pounds. I'd turn to food to comfort myself because of stress. I also had lower back pain caused by my weight gain and stress. Emotionally, I had high anxiety and a mild level of depression.

How did you transition into a job to fit your needs? I realized I couldn't keep working in this field because it wasn't fulfilling and it was unhealthy, both emotionally and physically. The turning point came when I went to a therapist, which helped me find balance by looking inside of myself. This was the beginning of listening to my needs.

One of my close friends suggested massage therapy. I enrolled at SOMA Clinical Massage Institute and got my certification by taking night classes. I started giving massages out of my home and I made house calls. I currently give massages to the employees of the American

Hospital Association.

How did it change your outlook or emotional or physical health?

I'm passionate about what I do and find it very rewarding. I've seen a dramatic positive change in my physical and emotional health. I've lost 35 pounds and no longer experience lower back pain. My anxiety and depression are gone.

DONNA PALICKA

Owner of Sister ARTS Studio

How did you know your job was dysfunctional?

I had my career established as an interior designer for an architectural firm for over 10 years before I had my daughter Ona. After she was born my work/life balance for the next decade was totally out of control. My job involved extensive travel and being in the creative field, I was expected to work as many hours as it took to get the job done.

What emotional or physical health issues did you experience?

I was extremely frustrated that I couldn't spend time with my daughter. I felt I was a mother who couldn't raise her own

child. I loved my career but at this time it didn't fit my needs. I wasn't getting enough sleep, which made me impatient and short with my daughter. I had tremendous anxiety and became depressed.

How did you transition into a job to fit your needs? At the time my husband began to go blind, I went to a psychiatrist who was like a mentor to me. We talked about what my ideal life and career would look like. That put me in the frame of mind where I started thinking about what I needed to change.

I took classes at the Women's Business Development Center to help me understand how to create a business plan. I cut my hours at work and taught a class at Ona's

school in knitting, weaving and crocheting and saw there was a demand for it. I used our savings to open up Sister ARTS Studio.

How did it change your outlook or emotional or physical health? My emotional and physical health has improved 100 percent because I love what I do every day. I now have quality time to bond with Ona, who calls me the coolest mom!

JANE DIRENZO PIGOTT

Managing Director R3 Group LLC, a company that provides leadership, change and diversity consulting to organizations

How did you know your job was dysfunctional? When I woke up in the morning and didn't

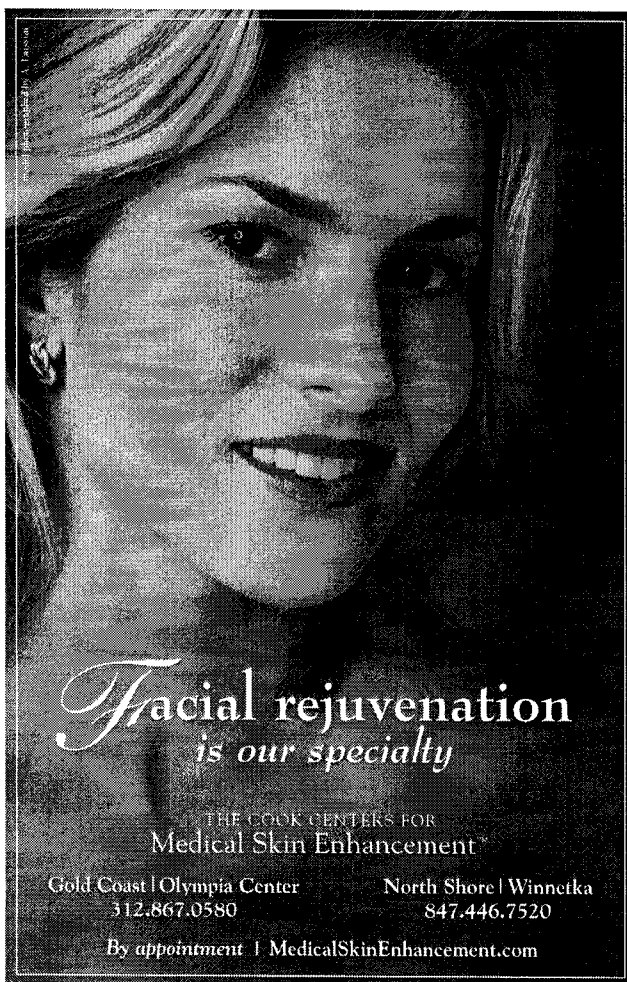
feel energized about going to work. Or when I felt I had to look too much outside the organization for satisfaction, then I knew something was out of balance.

What emotional or physical health issues did you experience? Stress was what I experienced. Like many women, I multitask so much it drastically raises my stress level. So I always need to create boundaries. For me, I have to step over a boundary and be uncomfortable with it for a while in order to define where that boundary needs to be. When that gets out of balance the price is higher than the benefit, and that's when I sought new employment.

How did you transition into a job to fit your needs? I had to be honest with myself about what my strengths were and find a job that utilized those strengths. As a woman I felt it was off-putting to ask for help, but learned to identify resources outside myself that could help develop my natural abilities.

How did it change your outlook or emotional and physical health? I love being an entrepreneur because it fits where I currently am. Right now I have a very high satisfaction level because I have a very integrated life both professionally and personally, instead of competing concerns. ■

Gary Scholar is a health and wellness consultant.




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