

Improving the

BOTTOM LINE

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7 Career Mistakes That Turn Your Mojo into Nojo

If you've been working hard for any length of time, in any field, chances are you've experienced at least one humiliating career failure. Career "hiccups" can kill your spirit and make it difficult to regain your motivation and drive.

Some of the "bad" things that happen to hardworking, well-meaning, capable people each day include:

- Missing the big opportunity
- Getting passed over for a promotion
- Getting demoted
- Losing a lot of money
- Getting fired
- Going bankrupt

What happens to us when our worst career nightmares come true?

There may not be scandalous headlines in the local papers, but with the emotional turmoil you're experiencing, there may as well be.

Public or company humiliations suck the air out of one's spirit, making it hard to carry on with dignity and drive. Our lifeblood and mental energy are drained.

Career-altering events can happen to anyone — and they do. But when they happen to us, they seem incomprehensible, largely because we've worked so hard to be nice, dedicated and well-meaning.

But even when we can partially blame the economy, there comes a time when we must take a hard look at what we could have done differently. Despite faltering companies, imperfect leaders, coworkers who don't like us and other external variables, we must eventually engage in private, honest introspection. It's time to ask: What part did I play in the events leading up to the career crisis?



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Defining Mojo

Historically and culturally, the word “mojo” has been associated with witchcraft and voodoo—specifically, the ability to cast spells. Over the years, it has become urban slang for personal power, magnetism and charisma.

In business speak today, mojo refers to the moment we do something purposeful and powerful — an act lauded by others. In sports, business and politics, the term has evolved to describe a sense of positive direction.

For some, mojo represents personal advancement: moving forward, making progress, achieving goals, clearing hurdles, passing the competition — and doing so with increasing ease. What you’re doing matters, and you enjoy it. Star athletes call this being “in the zone.” Others describe it as “flow.”

Mojo plays a vital role in our pursuit of happiness and meaning, as it involves achieving two simple goals: loving what you do and showing it.

Lost Mojo

In *Mojo: How to Get It, How to Keep It, How to Get It Back If You Lose It*, leadership expert Marshall Goldsmith introduces the term “nojo” — the opposite of mojo.

Nojo sufferers approach their work negatively. They’re bored, frustrated, dispirited and confused about the dark tunnel that envelops their career — and they aren’t shy about sharing their dissatisfaction with others.

Nojo happens when we experience a career failure and don’t get over it. Individuals who are incapable of looking inward to identify their role in a negative event get stuck — and stay stuck. As their spirit sours, they’re never able to recapture their mojo.

In some cases, people seem to have mojo one day and nojo the next. This volatility is often caused by a series of ongoing, hard-to-spot mistakes that in time lead to a crisis. If we can recognize our errors early, we can prevent events from spiraling out of control.

Common Career Mistakes

Goldsmith lists seven professional mistakes that contribute to career failures in otherwise competent, successful and smart people:

- ▶ 1. Over-committing
- ▶ 2. Waiting for the Facts to Change
- ▶ 3. Looking for Logic in All the Wrong Places
- ▶ 4. Bashing the Boss
- ▶ 5. Refusing to Change Because of “Sunk Costs”
- ▶ 6. Confusing the Mode You’re in
- ▶ 7. Maintaining Pointless Arguments
 - » a. Let me keep talking.
 - » b. I had it rougher than you.
 - » c. Why did you do that?
 - » d. It’s not fair.

As you examine these potential pitfalls, try to pinpoint the ones to which you’re predisposed.

1. Over-committing

If you’re good at what you do and like your job, it’s easy to take on new challenges. You’re bursting with mojo. People want you in their meetings and on their teams.

The old adage, “If you want something done, just ask a busy person,” may apply to you. And if you’re ambitious, the last thing you want to admit to your boss or coworkers is that you can’t handle everything.

If you believe you have superpowers, you will box yourself into a corner by taking on too many tasks. At that point, the quality of work and good humor will begin to fail, and you’ll lose your mojo (and possibly much more).

Ironically, the habit of over-committing has an unintended consequence: It makes us appear under-committed — a perception rarely appreciated by customers, colleagues or bosses.

2. Waiting for the Facts to Change

When we experience a setback, it’s not uncommon for us to wait for the facts to change into something more to our liking. Such wishful thinking is the opposite of over-committing, as it leads to under-acting. Instead of doing something, you freeze and do nothing.

When the facts are hard to swallow, ask yourself: “What path would I take if I knew the situation won’t get any better?” Then, get ready to pursue that path.

Doing nothing is akin to moving backward — a behavior you cannot afford in a constantly changing world.

3. Looking for Logic in All the Wrong Places

We devote many professional hours to finding logic in situations where none exists.

Human beings are profoundly illogical. Our minds crave order, fairness and justice, and we're trained to value logic. But much of life, work and decisions that affect us are unreasonable, unfair or unjust, which sets us up for disappointment and can kill mojo.

We sometimes hope logic will prevail against all odds and that it will prove we're in the right. If we capriciously stick to our guns until the bitter end, everyone will see how right we are. In the meantime, we seriously damage important relationships.

4. Bashing the Boss

Talent-management firm DDI found that the average American spends 15 hours a month criticizing or complaining about his or her boss. Indeed, boss-bashing is a popular diversion.

But while it may relieve tension and get a few laughs, denigrating your boss is not particularly attractive. Other people will wonder what you'll say about them when they're not around.

Bashing doesn't build a better boss. It only serves to tarnish your reputation and lower your mojo. The negativity you spread will almost certainly affect others' mojo, too.

5. Refusing to Change Because of "Sunk Cost"

Once incurred, a sunk cost cannot be recovered. Unfortunately, it's also the basis for many irrational decisions that go against our best interest. When we throw more money at a problem and hope for different results, we compound the error — all because we cannot admit our error.

Each of us has sunk costs in our lives. We didn't become successful because of luck; rather, we had to invest a big piece of ourselves in our work. At some point, this investment may have stopped paying off, without our awareness.

Are your decisions based on what you might lose or what you have to gain? It's the former, your devotion to sunk costs may be costing you more than you know: your mojo.

6. Confusing the Mode You're in

We have two modes of behavior: professional and relaxed. Our professional selves are image-conscious. We pay attention to how we look, dress, speak and behave. We can't afford to be sloppy.

In relaxed mode, some of us go to opposite extremes. We're less guarded about everything, including our speech, language and use of humor.

So, what happens when we're in relaxed mode, but still in the company of work colleagues and friends? Are we sarcastic and cynical in ways inappropriate to the office setting?

The more you close the gap between who you are as a professional and who you are when relaxed, the greater the trust and confidence you'll generate. You'll demonstrate genuineness, and you'll avoid slipping into sloppiness with humor and language, which can put a dent in your mojo.

7. Maintaining Pointless Arguments

Arguing happens anytime you put a group of intelligent, successful people into a room and give them a problem to solve. It also happens simply because people have egos, and it's human nature to compete with other members of the tribe.

Arguing can put our mojo at risk by needlessly creating enemies instead of allies. Many arguments are traps in which we fight to improve our status among the tribe, rather than to solve a problem for the greater good.

Learn to avoid the following argument traps that do nothing more than zap your spirit:

- » **a. *Let me keep talking:*** Everyone has opinions and enjoys expressing them. In fact, we feel it's our right to do so. Sometimes, however, we just can't stop; we have to have the last word. It can be very hard for smart people to "just let it go."
- » **b. *I had it rougher than you:*** When we revel in how poor we were and how much we had to overcome to achieve our current station in life, all we're doing is trying to elicit other people's admiration. What's the point?
- » **c. *Why did you do that?*** We'll never know people's true motivations. We can speculate with generosity or paranoia, but we never may get a completely frank answer. Why waste hours trying to get to the bottom of why people do things? It will only exhaust your mojo.
- » **d. *It's not fair:*** You disagree with a decision that has been made. Worse, you believe you haven't been given a legitimate explanation. Arguing won't change the outcome and makes you look childish. Deal with it. Save your precious mojo.

These four "losing" arguments have the same end result: no change in outcome. Look for ways to make your point, and then move on, with your mojo intact.

Mojo Recuperation

What can you do when you recognize these behaviors in yourself?

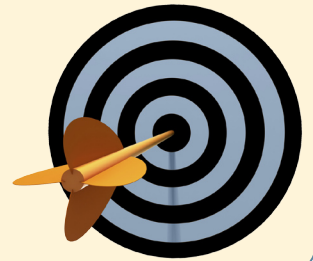
It's easy to say, "OK, guess I'll stop doing that." It's harder to maintain progress whenever you seek lasting behavior change.

Someone once asked Goldsmith, "Does anyone ever really change?" After surveying 86,000 former clients and, later on, more than 250,000 respondents from his leadership development seminars, his conclusion is unequivocal:

"Very few people achieve positive, lasting change without ongoing follow-up. Unless they know at the end of the day (or week or month) that someone is going to measure if they're doing what they promised to do, most people fall prey to inertia."

The key words in Goldsmith's statement are "measure" and "follow-up." Because very few people can succeed alone with self-help efforts, many seek assistance from a mentor or executive coach.

Always remember that your competition continually responds to a changing business environment by working longer and harder. This means mojo is not an option; it's a career differentiator. You need it to separate yourself from the throng — and your personal spirit will ultimately thank you.



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