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*For twenty seven years, the Monthly Mentor has been a value added service to encourage our employer and candidate clients in their Personal & Professional Development.*



## Boredom at Work & Six Tips to Conquer It

*By Joe Hunt*

Even though you may have a great job, you can still experience boredom at work. Who hasn't been sitting at the computer when a restless feeling starts gnawing away and thoughts meander anywhere but on the task required?



*“Boredom is an aversive state characterized by dissatisfaction, restlessness, and weariness,”*  
- Andreas Elpidorou, a University of Louisville researcher, noted in the journal [\*Frontiers in Psychology\*](#).

[A recent Forbes article](#) reports that multiple university studies have found that boredom can unhinge even high-performing professionals, resulting in sabotage, withdrawal, abusing team members and purposely failing at tasks.

According to 2011 research by management-consulting firm Gallup, [71% of American workers are either not engaged or actively disengaged from their jobs](#), with highly educated and middle-aged workers the least likely to feel involved in and enthusiastic about their work.

A feeling of boredom can cause one to question the meaning and value of just about everything. Boredom isn't just wasteful, it is stressful. If you're busy, and yet still bored, it's even more so.

Boredom can come not only from having nothing to do but from having nothing that seems worthwhile to do.

If boredom came solely from a lack of things to do, we could eliminate boredom by simply having more to do. But this solution only works in the short-term when what we are asked to do does not feel meaningful.

Boredom is not something to be taken lightly or ignored, especially when we become bored at work. The quality of our efforts can be seriously impacted by feelings of boredom. In studies using a boredom-process scale, those who rated low were better performers in areas such as education, career and autonomy.



*“My boredom stems not from having nothing to do but from having nothing that seems worthwhile doing. We human beings are addicted to meaning, and this kind of existential boredom signals its unhappy retreat.”*

- Mark de Rond, *“Are You Busy at Work but Still Bored?”* Harvard Business Review, July 2012

### 3 Types of Boredom

Let’s explore three types of boredom. The first type shows up when we are prevented from engaging in wanted activity. The second type occurs when we are forced to engage in unwanted activity; and the third type is when, for no apparent reason, we are unable to feel engaged for any length of time in any particular activity.

Studies have indicated that an impression of boredom may be influenced by an individual’s degree of attention. A high acoustic level of distraction from the environment correlates with higher reports of boredom. This makes sense. If you aren’t paying attention because of distractions or other reasons, it’s not likely you are going to get engaged with tasks.

One study suggests that boredom has an evolutionary basis that encourages humans to seek out new challenges, which may, ultimately, influence human learning and ingenuity. Perhaps it was boredom that propelled Christopher Columbus to explore new continents. Many of today’s innovations may stem from people who seek out new challenges.

## Are Some People Prone to Boredom?

Is there such a thing as boredom proneness? Apparently so, and it is defined as a tendency to experience boredom of all types – typically assessed by the Boredom Proneness Scale.

Boredom proneness is clearly associated with attention problems. It has been shown to be linked to symptoms of depression.

Although boredom is often viewed as a trivial and mild irritant, proneness to boredom is linked to a diverse range of psychological, physical, educational, and social problems. In my opinion, it's a key reason to work with a coach to find a solution.

## How Can Boredom Be Conquered?

How can we adjust work when boredom strikes, even though we may have more than enough work to keep us busy all day? How do we escape that feeling when we have a task that doesn't excite or engage us?

In a Fast Company article, *6 Ways the Most Successful People Conquer Boredom at Work*, Sam Harrison suggests six tips.

1. *Force yourself to be curious, because boredom is oftentimes a loss of curiosity.*
2. *You can try putting yourself in the shoes of whoever will benefit from the project you're working on. How will the choices you make affect them?*
3. *Look outside your own world and see how another subject or emotion was approached.*
4. *Aim to do something deliberately amusing and make yourself laugh. Interestingly enough, laughter and boredom can't exist simultaneously.*
5. *Take a hike or stroll in new surroundings for fresh perspectives. Even moving to another room or a nearby coffee shop can help. Sometimes a simple change in scenery can reignite those brain cells.*
6. *Try looking at your project in a new way; anything that gives you a change in perspective.*

It's easy to dismiss critical “stuck points” in your career as temporary boredom. In actuality, boredom is a sign that you need to do something else. Don't let it become habitual. The longer it lasts, the harder it is to get “unstuck.”

In the end, boredom can seriously undermine others' perceptions of your potential, as well as your chances for more interesting work opportunities. Speak up and discuss its causes and solutions. Your brain craves interesting things to do.

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