Dear Alice,

I went to college to better myself for a better job. It has been over a year and I have not found a new job yet. I feel like I wasted my money. And I am sick to death of my job. I hate finding a new job because it may be just as bad or worse. What can I do?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It's no picnic to go to a job that you can't stand every day. You can't help wondering, "Why did I spend all that money on college, or study so hard, if I'm still working here?" However, instead of being stuck with feeling stuck, take action! You may want to consider re-framing your perspective on finding a new job. You mention that it could be "just as bad or worse." But what if it's not? Try to focus on finding and accepting a position that you find more enjoyable and that expands your skill set. Now, on to your question about what to do. Consider breaking down the job search into smaller steps. Here are some ideas:

Identify your interests and goals.
What do you like to do? What topics do you find interesting? Are there parts of your current job that you enjoy now? Write these things down. Having a clear idea about your interests will help you to more quickly identify jobs that might be a better fit. And what about your goals? In the short-term, it sounds like finding a job that satisfies your needs is top priority. Beyond that, take time to jot down some ideas about where you want to be in one year, five years, or even ten years. Doing this can help you see where you want to be in the future.

Do some research.
Are there certain companies that you'd love to work for? Make a list and begin calling them to see if they are hiring. Also browse job listings (most of which are likely online) for openings that interest you. Find out what the company does, their mission, some history, and anything else that could help you decide if you'd like to work there.

Talk to folks in your field of interest.
Okay, so you've figured out what field you'd like to explore. Do you know people who work in this field?

- If you do, try a bit of networking: talk with them about what they do and how they got there, ask for recommendations, and make sure to ask for a few names and numbers of
others who work in the field. It can be a very effective way of making connections with people or organizations that may be able to hook you up with possible job opportunities.

- If you don’t, try to set up an informational interview: look at agencies or organizations that interest you. Call and ask if you can speak with someone about what they do. This can often lead to job possibilities or more resources and contacts, at the least. Always come to these interviews nicely or professionally dressed, with copies of your resume, and ask your interviewee for some names of others whom you could meet.

Get your resume together.
Do you have an updated resume? Highlight all relevant aspects of your career and educational experiences. Include any involvement with community service organizations or other extra-curricular activities while in college. Make sure to use action verbs, such as "developed," "created," or "implemented," and check the spelling, grammar, and succinctness. Ask your more experienced friends to read it and make suggestions as well. Referring to resources on resume writing could offer you some other good pointers.

Prepare to interview.
Interviewing for a new position can be nerve-wracking. However, there are lots of tips to help you ace that interview and knock the socks off of a potential employer. If you’re able, practice interviewing with mock questions to get in the flow of responding and communicating your thoughts clearly. Have someone (a friend, family member, or career counselor) point out some strengths and weaknesses, which you can then work on improving. Additionally, there are certain things you can do to impress your interviewer. Remember to:

- Make eye contact.
- Dress for success.
- Highlight your experience.
- Know about the company that’s interviewing you.
- Be prepared with questions about the position.
- Show enthusiasm.

And though you hate your current job, you may want to be careful about disclosing this in an interview, if at all. The goal of the interview is to convey that you are capable and interested, and would make a great addition to their company.

Begin applying for positions that interest you.
You’re ready to go for it! Look at the newspaper, online job boards, position announcements at your former college, and human resource departments at your desired companies. Send your resume with individualized cover letters for each organization to the appropriate place or person. You may also consider utilizing the services of a job headhunter, who can match you with potential job openings in your field(s) of interest.

The career services office at your college may also be able to assist you with number of these tasks and exercises. Consider contacting them to see if they offer any support to alumni. The bottom line here is that searching for a new job can take some time and a lot of effort, but finding a job that meets your goals and excites you is worth it. And remember: you made it through college so that you could find a better job. Commend yourself for that. You sound like you have a lot of determination.

Good luck!