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,

Not everyone feels like whistling while they work, but having a job you don't like can feel unbearable. Oftentimes, working means spending more waking hours at your job than with family or friends, so job angst can easily cause negative emotions to start to color your whole outlook. Here’s the good news: having stable employment (even a lousy job) might give you the flexibility to start thinking more selectively about your next position, rather than rushing into something that could be “just as bad or worse,” as you mentioned.

To find a position that you find more enjoyable and that builds on your newly acquired skill set, consider breaking down the job search into smaller, actionable steps. Here are some ideas:

- **Identify your interests and goals:** What do you like to do? Are there parts of your current job that you enjoy now? Are there tasks you never want to do again? Is there a particular field or industry you’d like to work in? A job title you’d like to have? It may be useful write these thoughts down, as having a clear idea about your interests may help you to more quickly identify jobs that might be a better fit and 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 that are currently hiring? Companies often have a “Join our Team” or “Careers” link on their website, which is a great place to start. Also, you could browse job listings (most of which are likely online) for openings that interest you. If one catches your eye, 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 with folks in your field of interest:** If you know people in the field, you could 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. If you don’t, you may look into setting up an informational interview: look at companies or organizations that interest you. You may consider reaching out and ask if you can speak with someone about what they do, and what types of skill sets they might be looking for in future hires. This can often lead to job possibilities — or more resources and contacts, at the least.

- **Get your resume together:** To best feature yourself, it’s a good idea to highlight all relevant aspects of your career and educational experiences. You can also include any involvement with community service organizations or other extracurricular activities while in college. Was there a class that you loved and hope to expand on professionally? You can mention relevant coursework on your resume as well. Using action verbs, such as "developed," "created," or "implemented," and checking the spelling, grammar, and succinctness can help add to a stronger application. You could also ask friends or family in later stages of their career to read it and make suggestions.

- **Begin applying for positions that interest you:** To improve your chances, you may want to 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.

- **Prepare to interview:** If you’re able, practicing mock interview questions to get in the flow of responding and communicating your thoughts clearly with a friend, family member, or career counselor could be useful. In a real interview, it’s helpful to make eye contact, dress appropriately, and highlight your relevant experience. Additionally, it’s useful to come prepared with knowledge about the organization and questions for the interviewer.

Although you may dislike your current job, you may find it helpful to be very thoughtful in how you approach your search with both your future and current employer. In any application materials or interviews, you may be wise to frame your dislikes or frustrations with your current role in a way that won’t badmouth your employer and show you in a positive light. Additionally, although job hunts can be very time consuming, job searching on your own time may also help you avoid any trouble at your current job. While frustrating, it can be helpful to remember that the job search process can take a long time as you try to find the right fit for you.

What if you just don’t have time for this whole ordeal? Some workplace conditions are simply intolerable, and waiting for the perfect job could be a detriment to your physical or mental health. If you’re dealing with harassment, abuse, or bodily harm, you may need to get out quickly. In that case, you might think about other options. Do you have an emergency fund that could allow you to quit and get through the next few months while you look for another position? If not, you might consider looking for part-time or contract-based work so that your next position doesn’t feel like a permanent commitment while you look for your dream job.

The career services office at your college may also be able to assist you with some of the above steps. You may 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.

Here’s to bigger and better things!