

HOW to DECIDE
WHEN it's TIME to
QUIT
YOUR JOB

PAUL WHITE, PhD



Have you seriously thought about quitting your job, but you can't decide whether it is "that bad"? Join the majority of employees. Unfortunately, most people today don't enjoy their work. A recent Gallup poll found that over 50% of workers either are enduring their current job, or actively hate it. In another poll, between 55% and 82% of employees describe their bosses as "jerks" (depending on the workplace).

So if you really don't like where you work, you are not alone.

But quitting your job in today's difficult economy is a scary decision to make. Finding another job with the same (or better) pay is challenging, to say the least. So, it is wise to stop and think about the realities of life before you say "take this job and shove it" and walk out the door.

As a psychologist, career coach, and business consultant, I've seen the challenges of "bad matches" between employees, supervisors, and employers from multiple perspectives. As a result, I decided I wanted to help people be able to think through the issues they need to consider—whether or not they should actually quit (or plan to quit) or stay at their current job.

In our book *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, my co-authors and I interviewed dozens of people who had worked or were working in unhealthy work environments. Many who chose to leave a toxic workplace stated that they didn't realize how bad their situation was until after they left. As one person reported, "I couldn't believe I hadn't seen how bad it was sooner!"

HOW BAD IS IT?

One challenge is that most of us haven't worked in a lot of different places, so we don't know if our current workplace is "normally bad," really bad, or one of the worst places to work in the country. One resource to check out is the *Ratings of Toxic Symptoms* scale that we developed to give individuals some objective feedback. It provides input on the level of overall toxicity of your workplace. Go to appreciationatwork.com/toxicworkplaces for more information.

But let's address some ways to think about your current work environment and determine how bad it is. One helpful approach is to assess the problems you see by asking a series of questions regarding the problem behaviors and negative characteristics displayed in the organization:

What has been their duration? That is, how long have they existed? Are they relatively new, or have they been there as long as you have worked there (and longer)?

What is the frequency of the negative behaviors? How often do they occur? Daily? Weekly? Every three months?

What is the intensity of the behaviors? (For example, there is a difference between your supervisor using an angry tone with you and swearing at you.)

How many problem behaviors are there? Just one or two? Or are there ten or more? Or too many to count?

How many people are displaying the behaviors regularly? Is it primarily your supervisor or a colleague, or are the behaviors rampant across most of the organization at multiple levels?

What solutions have been tried, if any, either by you or others? If no interventions have been tried, why not? What results have occurred in response to different actions taken?

What is the impact on the organization resulting from the negative behaviors and characteristics?

What is the impact on you that is occurring from the unhealthy behaviors and characteristics? (See next page.)

And finally, are your concerns about your workplace due primarily to a series of recent events or more a result of a pattern of long-term, chronic, and poor functioning? It is important to take some time to think through and write down answers to the previous questions. It is easy to just quickly go through them in your mind, but if you take the time to reflect and write down specifics, you will gain a far more accurate picture of the seriousness (or not) of the issues concerning you.

THE IMPACT ON YOUR LIFE

Probably the most important factor to consider in this decision is to determine the impact your current workplace is having on you and your life. Let's look at some areas you should consider.

Your physical health

- Weight gain (or loss of appetite)
- Frequent headaches
- Digestive problems
- Increased health problems or accidents
- Difficulties with sleep (can't get to sleep, waking up, nightmares, not feeling rested)

Your ways of coping

- Over-the-counter medications, prescription medications
- Increased use of alcohol, marijuana, or mood-altering drugs
- Excessive use of the computer, watching TV and movies
- Social withdrawal (not wanting to interact with others)
- Excessive spending (clothes, hobbies, vacations)

Your emotional health

- Anxiety
- Anger
- Irritability
- Discouragement
- Depression
- Hopelessness
- Lack of energy to complete tasks

Your mental functioning

- Increased forgetfulness
- Disorganization
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Not able to handle typical responsibilities

Your relationships and personal lifestyle

- Social withdrawal
- No time / energy for other areas of your life

OTHER FACTORS

I think there are a couple of other factors that need to be mentioned specifically for you to consider as you determine whether or not it is time for you to seriously consider leaving your current position.

First, if you are directly aware of any decisions or actions that are clear violations of the law, or of your industry's ethical standards, that have been taken (and not corrected) within your organization, I would raise serious concerns about continuing with the organization. It is fairly rare for employees to have firsthand knowledge of such violations, which suggests there may be many others that are not known. And you don't want to be mixed up in any legal problems that come down the line as a result.

Secondly, you should take seriously the input and advice you receive from trustworthy family members and friends. They know you well and care for you. They have seen the impact of your workplace on you over time. Listen to them, and do not readily discount their observations.

WHAT TO DO

You have different options to choose from, but regardless of the choice you make, you must take some action on your own behalf.

If you decide to STAY:

Identify what you need to do for you.

You need to take care of yourself; if you don't, no one else will.

Determine what action steps you can take to help make the workplace healthier.

Set a time frame by which you will re-evaluate the situation (e.g. six months).

See if you are managing the stress from work okay (and ask those around you). Be honest with yourself—has the situation gotten worse?

If you believe you need to LEAVE:

Seek counsel to make sure you are thinking clearly and haven't overlooked something.

Take steps to prepare.

- + Get your resume in order.
- + Start looking for job possibilities.
- + Discreetly put the word out.
- + Save money to help you during the transition.

Develop a plan for finding your next job and implement it.

Continue to implement the plan over time.

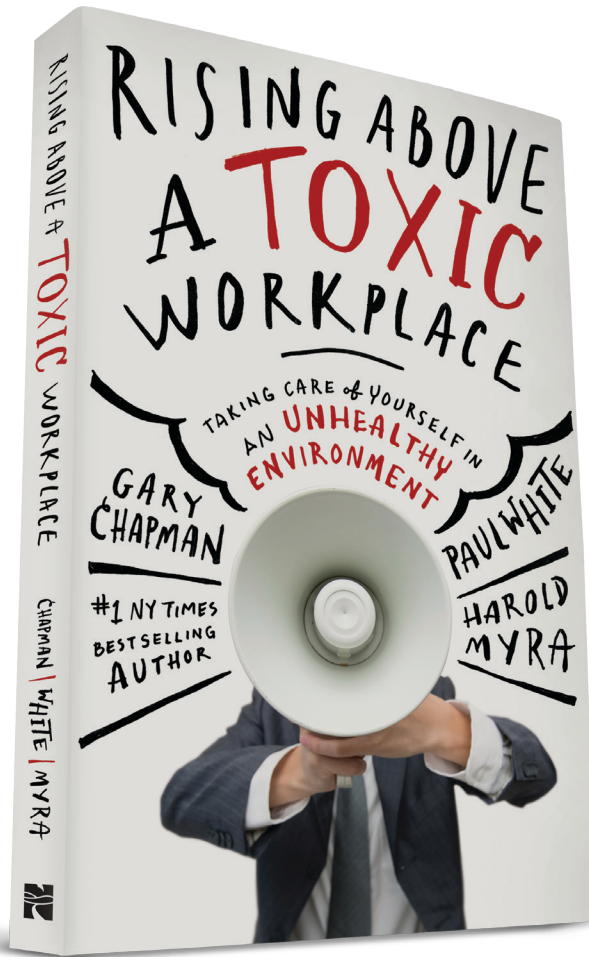
Determine when “enough is enough.”

Sometimes you just can't take any more—your health is deteriorating or your boss does or says something that is totally unacceptable.

Finally, if at all possible, *avoid getting into a position of being desperate*. A wise friend once shared with me: “Do your best to avoid getting into a desperate situation, because most of us don't make good decisions when we are desperate.” Practical translation? If you need to leave your current job, do as much as you can to plan for the transition. If possible, keep working while you look for another job. Keep your expenses low. If necessary, consider taking a “fill in the gap” job just for cash flow while you look for another job in your field of expertise. Assume that finding a job will take at least two times longer than you think it will (and often, much longer).

I hope you have found this process to be helpful to you in your decision-making process. Even more so, I trust your life will improve as a result of the decision you make.





BRUTAL BOSSES. POISONOUS PEOPLE. SOUL-CRUSHING CULTURES.

This book will give you the confidence to rise above them all.

Do you work in a toxic environment or have a toxic boss? You're not alone! Today, unattainable expectations, emotional harassment, and demands to do more with less often leave employees overworked, underpaid, insecure, and out of options. Must you continue to put up with poisonous people in a morale-crushing environment?

You can rise above. You do have options.

For more information, go to

www.appreciationatwork.com/toxicworkplaces.



DR. PAUL WHITE, PhD, is the coauthor of *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace: Taking Care of Yourself in an Unhealthy Environment*, along with Dr. Gary Chapman and Harold Myra. He is a licensed psychologist who has worked with individuals, businesses and families in a variety of settings for over 20 years. He received his B.A. from Wheaton, his Masters from Arizona State, and his PhD in Counseling Psychology from Georgia State University. He consults with successful businesses and high net worth families, dealing with the relational issues intertwined with business and financial wealth. In addition to serving businesses, families and organizations across the U.S., Dr. White has also spoken and consulted in Europe, Central Asia, the Caribbean, and South America.

For more information, please visit his website at www.drpaulwhite.com.