Medicine Woman
Changing Lives
Through Innovation
"I got it!" - Siobhan could not contain her delight about being offered a new job. We've been friends for years and I always admired how quickly she moved up the career ladder. This time, she was headhunted by a recruiter and three interviews later offered, what she called, her dream job. She hit the ground running with many exciting projects to manage. Five months later, I heard her complain about it for the first time, a year later she was already antsy and ready for another challenge. Soon she began job hunting, yet again, and so the vicious circle continued.

When we are offered a new job, we often get a boost of happiness. The thought of doing something different, meeting new people, changing our usual environment or challenging ourselves, makes us experience a lot of positive emotions and gives us a higher sense of meaning. As we sense the joy, amusement, inspiration, hope or pride, we feel invincible. Often, our positivity spills into other aspects of our lives and we enjoy living on a high. We are almost consumed by all the positive emotions we're experiencing and become addicted to them. As soon as they start going we panic and explain to ourselves that we need another change, another job, to bring the happiness back.

What we might not realise, though, is that we have just hit the effects of hedonic adaptation. Hedonic adaptation is a phenomenon that describes how we become accustomed to positive experiences over time. Studies show that lottery winners get a boost of happiness shortly after their windfall, but within a year to 18 months they adapt to their new circumstances and their positive emotions plummet as a result. When we get a new job, a similar effect takes place. However, what's even more interesting is that those who keep changing jobs frequently experience more dissatisfaction than those who stay in their jobs.

In a five year longitudinal study carried out in the US amongst managers earning €100k per annum, researchers found that leaders who changed their jobs experienced an immediate boost of happiness akin to euphoria. Their expectations went up hoping for an even better career than they had to date. However, within a year their satisfaction plunged as they focused less and less on the novelty of their jobs and became consumed by the daily hassles. Soon their happiness levels dropped bringing them either back to the pre-employment levels or even lower. This in turn, resulted in them wanting to change their jobs and off they went seeking another thrill.

At the same time, all the managers who in the five year period stayed in the same position, did not experience the high of a new job, but neither did they experience the low. They were no more or less happy than they were at the beginning of the study.

So when you're thinking of changing job, think again. Do you enjoy the highs and lows in your life, or prefer a steady, quieter life?

Here are five exercises that will help you overcome the hedonic adaptation and stay longer and happier in your job:
Make this day at work your last

Researchers found that when we imagine our day or week to be our last, we begin to appreciate it as if it were our first. Therefore, a psychologist from the University of California conducted a month long experiment in which participants were encouraged to imagine they are going to move away from their current jobs and live their month as if it were their last. As a result their job satisfaction and positive emotions increased significantly.

Remind yourself of your last job

Take 5-10 minutes to remind yourself what you didn’t like about your previous jobs and what it would be like if you didn’t get this one. If your colleagues in your last job were unfriendly, go out for lunch on your own to remind yourself what it was like before. If you earned less, set a week to limit your spending to the level you had before your current position. All this will help you appreciate what you have much more and prevent you from slipping into your hedonic adaptation.

Reign in your aspirations

In a study of MBA graduates the researchers found that when their reason for studying was to get a pay rise or a better job, they soon became disillusioned and less satisfied with their lives in comparison to those who did not complete an MBA. Same happens with a new job. When we change a job, our expectations rise. We want it to be more gratifying than the previous one and we want to be more stimulated than before. When it doesn’t happen we get disillusioned. In order to overcome the hedonic adaptation we need to reign in our aspirations and focus on achieving smaller goals, such as winning that business, creating that product, rather than larger, abstract ones such as feeling happier and fulfilled in life.

Shift your reference point

When you think of your perfect job, what do you imagine? Do you see yourself excited by every project you complete? Can you picture all the awards and compliments you receive? Or do you visualise being a millionaire? Whatever your dreams, chances are the reality will never match them. Even 007 had the less exciting parts of his job. Each position has periods of high stress, monotone work, disappointments and unpleasant colleagues. To make sure you’re satisfied with what you have, change your reference point. Think of how grateful you are to have your current position and focus on what you enjoy most about it.

Before you change your job consider whether you’re doing it for the right reasons. Is it because you’ve experienced hedonic adaptation and love the addictive effect of euphoria. If so, stay in your current job and work harder on making it more enjoyable. However, if you’re moving on because you want to develop your skills further, progress your career or find your calling, then apply for new positions today. Good luck!

Jolanta Burke is a Positive Psychologist and a PhD researcher in Trinity College Dublin. For more tips on how to enhance your happiness, log on to: www.jolantaburke.com
WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS

1. JOLANTA BURKE
Jolanta Burke is a Positive Psychologist and PhD Researcher in Trinity College Dublin. She specialises in helping employees achieve high performance through developing resilience, managing character strengths and well-being. She has spoken at many conferences and published numerous articles in Ireland and abroad. Her first book is coming out next year.
A: Men wearing white socks with their dark suits. It's crazy! Makes me stop the meeting half way and ask them to take them off. Very distracting.

2. MOIRA CREEDON
After five years as Senior Finance Specialist at the Irish Management Institute, Moira launched Artemis Consultancy to offer financial advice and training to companies and organisations at both a national and international level. Moira holds an MBA from IESE Barcelona, focusing on business finance.
A: Finance professionals making really simple stuff sound incredibly complicated so people think what they do is too complex to query.

3. JILL KERBY
A: Companies who answer their 'customer service' telephone lines with three layers of computer voices only to finally tell you that there is no one available to take your call "at this moment." You know who you are...

4. JO LAVELLE
Jo Lavelle is a communications professional, editor and journalist with 12 years experience in the magazine, newspaper and radio industry. In addition to running a group of successful lifestyle magazines, under the umbrella of Goldenegg Productions Jo was also a key player in the setting up and editing of online magazine, Goldenegg.ie. She's just recently joined the PR world.
A: Sharing a spoon for yoghurts or cereal.

5. PATRICIA MCGOVERN
Patricia McGovern is an Irish solicitor, registered trade mark agent and European trade mark and design attorney. She is Chairman of DFMG Solicitors where she also heads the Commercial Department and the Intellectual Property Department. She advises a wide range of clients from small businesses to multinational companies.
A: Tailgaters

6. LIV MORGAN
Liv Morgan is a full-time member of the WMB staff having joined the team seven years ago. Prior to WMB she was a freelance writer/journalist contributing to other business and specialist titles including The Investor, Business Ireland, The Garda Times, Maternity and Infant.
A: Pram pushers who take up the whole pavement... and communications people who don't readily provide their contact details - How did you get your job?!

7. RUTH O'CONNOR
Ruth O'Connor is a freelance journalist and mother of two boys. She has written for many publications including the Sunday Business Post, the Irish Times, Prudence, U magazine and has contributed to RTE Radio One and Dublin City Radio. Ruth has an MA in journalism from DCU and degree in English and Linguistics from UCD.
A: Deleting emails... thousands of them at the time of year when my extra storage account gets full! Too many press releases, not enough time!

8. EMILY A. HEIL
Emily Heil is a reporter for the Washington Post, where she has written about everything from scandal-plagued congressmen to female political dynasties. She has covered Congress for a decade, including stints as a congressional gossip columnist. She lives on Capitol Hill with her husband, also a journalist, two cats, and a large collection of shoes.
A: Incorrect use of the word "literally." That figuratively makes my head explode.