

Ask Sabina: Help! I'm stuck in a career rut

Dear Sabina

I am still not sure what career path I would like to take. I'm not doing well at work and I feel like I've failed in my current career. I don't know what to do. Please help, Nesira

Congratulations Nesira! I welcome and celebrate failure and invite you to do the same since failure offers us an important chance to learn and develop; or as Oprah Winfrey says, “failure is just life trying to move us in another direction.”

To better identify what your new direction may be, let's step away from the idea you need to know precisely which career path to take. Asking yourself such a global question is often utterly overwhelming, and typically sends us into a spiral of self-doubt, unhelpful comparisons with others, and general frustration. It also feeds into the myth that everyone else is somehow magically on the perfect job path of purpose, success, fulfilment and meaning. It can leave us feeling like we are the only person on the planet who hasn't read the elusive What Job Is Just Right for Me manual!

In other words, being bored at work and not knowing what to do are pretty universal experiences that almost everyone experiences at some stage in their life . They are essentially just another way of saying you're unsure what to do with the time you have that feels important and worthwhile to you.

Instead of focusing on your uncertainty, why not start by consciously and slowly exploring these four questions:

1. What gets you out of bed in the morning?
2. What tasks and activities do you look forward to in any given day/week (either personally or professionally)?
3. What do you talk about most with friends?
4. And what did you enjoy doing as a child when you could choose activities because they were interesting and appealing without pressure or expectations?

If you're struggling to answer these questions, break down your focus into more short-term goals about what you would like to do today, or this week, with your time. Do you like to create, invent, organise, analyse, support, nurture, or teach? Would you choose to do this autonomously, collaboratively, in short bursts, or as a slow burn over time? Do you value flexibility, deadlines, routine, freedom or structure? Next, expand your focus from today and this week to what you would like to do with your time over the next month.

Above all, welcome the crossroads you're at now as a sign it's time to act. Boredom and fear often result in paralysis which ultimately gets us more of the same. In contrast, making a commitment to do something different every day, no matter how small, helps shift the stuck-ness. Try daily exercise, read a blog on values, listen to a podcast (Seek Alt Route may be a good place to start!), talk to people about what they enjoy doing, ask friends/family/peers when they see you at your best, and keep a journal where you answer the above four questions.

Don't expect to be hit by a bolt of lightning filled with the perfect career solution. Rather be open to experiences, thinking and activities that align better with who you are, your values, passions, skills and needs.

Albert Einstein wrote, "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing its stupid." Your clear waters are out there, and this difficult period of uncertainty is a reminder to stop climbing trees; and find an environment that better suits your soon to be celebrated scales and fins.

Have you got a question for Sabina that you'd like featured? Submit it to asksabina@seek.com.au

Sabina Read



Sabina Read is SEEK's Resident Psychologist. Specialising in everything from workplace relationships to career change, Sabina has a passion for helping people in finding fulfillment in their careers.

