

Betting on You

What's in it for me? Become your own best advocate and create a life you love.

Most of us enter the workplace starry-eyed and then quickly become disillusioned. That's because many modern workplaces are broken. They work their employees into burnout, have negligent HR departments, and pay too little. It's all very bleak, but there's good news. No matter where you work, you have the power to change your life for the better. That might mean leaving a toxic workplace and finding a new job or adjusting your approach to your current job and making more space in life for the things that matter, like friends, fun, and travel. Are you, like over half of Americans, bored or unmotivated at work? Do you drag yourself through the week, counting down the time until you can retire? Then these blinks are just the thing for you. In these blinks, you'll learn

why medical tourism in Tijuana changed Laurie Ruettimann's life; how to stop valuing yourself by your work; and why it's never a good idea to quit in a rage.

Nobody can save you but you.

The author, Laurie Ruettimann, hated her job at Pfizer so much that she could barely bring herself to get out of bed in the mornings. She'd set alarm clocks all over the house because she just couldn't get up. Pfizer had offered her a job in its HR department which it promised would be full of learning opportunities and prestige. But when she started, she realized that her main task was to fly around the country firing employees who were victims of "restructuring." And the department she worked in was dysfunctional and toxic. She was miserable, and it affected every area of her life. Her health suffered because she overate and had no time to exercise. Her relationship with her husband was strained because she'd become bitter and cynical. She grew deeply depressed. But she couldn't see a way out – that is, until she got some inspiration from an unlikely source. Laurie was leafing through a magazine in an airport on one of her trips when she came across a story about Courtney Love going to Tijuana for weight-loss surgery. For some reason, this article filled her with an excitement she hadn't felt for a very long time. If Courtney Love could take charge of her life, then why couldn't she? So, she decided to plan her own crazy jaunt to Mexico for the same surgery. It changed her life. Not because it caused her to lose weight – although she did. It changed her life because it marked the moment that she took charge and started putting her own well-being first. She started exercising, finally went to a therapist, and began writing more – something she'd always loved doing. The blog she created about the secret world of HR took off, and within six months, she'd left Pfizer to become a full-time writer and consultant. Today, she advises people all over the world about how to become their own best HR consultants – and fix work by focusing on themselves first.

Stop identifying yourself by the work you do and become a professional slacker.

How do you introduce yourself to new people when you're at a party? If you're like most people, you'll probably say your name and then tell them where you work. That's called a career identity statement. While it might be useful for people to know what your job is, these kinds of introductions are also very limiting. The truth is, we're so much more than our work. We're friends and lovers and parents. We love obscure sci-fi books and exotic ice creams. We volunteer at animal shelters and harbor dreams of doing the tango. In short - we're nuanced. And our lives have a value and purpose that has nothing to do with what we do for a living. In today's hustle culture, it's normal to work 60-hour weeks and be available 24/7. But that comes at a cost. Overworking means you have no time for friends, family, exercise, sleep, and all the things that bring you joy. You need to start putting limits on work. Start by becoming a slacker, and stop taking on extra tasks. Working fewer hours doesn't mean being less productive. In fact, it means taking leadership over your life so you can be more productive in the time you have. Take Deanna, for instance. She's a busy executive who was successful at her job. But she was also getting burned out. She'd promised her team that she'd be there whenever they needed her, but they seemed to need her all the time. In her evenings, she'd be fielding texts and putting out fires instead of having time to recharge and be with her family. She was desperate for change and started looking for another job. But all the roles she saw just seemed to be more of the same. Instead of leaving, the author persuaded her to try another tactic: working less. Deanna called a meeting with her team and they all discussed how stressful it was to be on-call all the time, and defined together what constituted a real emergency and what could wait. Communications after hours decreased by 90 percent. And morale within the team soared. Becoming a slacker allowed her to keep her job and reconnect with the things she loves outside of work.

Beat failure by doing a premortem before you begin a new project.

In 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger launched in the US. Excited people gathered around their TV sets to watch this historic moment. But shortly after takeoff, the rocket exploded. Seven astronauts died that day. It was a tragedy that could have been avoided. An investigation revealed that one of the engineers working on the launch had warned his superiors about serious problems with the rocket. But nobody took any notice. NASA was so invested in getting the rocket to launch on time, that management brushed his concerns aside. Most workplaces share that reluctance to dwell on negative outcomes. We prefer to do a postmortem after everything has fallen apart than anticipate what could go wrong in advance. Yet, that's precisely what we need to do to ensure our projects are successful. People can have almost superstitious fears that talking about failure attracts it. But quite the opposite is true. In fact, studies have shown that doing a premortem - an exercise where you carefully think through everything that could potentially go wrong with a project - actually increases your chances of success by 30 percent. By doing this, you create solutions for problems before they even emerge. For example, if you've always dreamed of going out on your own as an entrepreneur, doing a premortem may show you that you risk running out of money quickly, or that you could struggle to bring in new clients. Identifying those problems allows you to put solutions in place in advance. For instance, you could stay an extra six months at your job to build up your savings. Or hire an assistant who's great at networking to drum up new business. Taking charge of your career involves taking risks. But pursuing happiness isn't about burning everything down. It's about being a pragmatic dreamer, visualizing exactly what you want, and then making sure to plan for

every contingency. Sometimes, doing a premortem reveals that the best course of action is to stay right where you are. You may learn that the things getting in the way of you liking your job would just follow you to your new workplace. Having that knowledge allows you to start making changes right here and now, with the benefit of a regular paycheck.

Channel your inner CEO and ask to be paid what you're worth.

We all know what it's like to live paycheck to paycheck, marveling at how our bank accounts empty so fast after paying the mortgage, insurance, and all the other monthly costs. It's no accident that so many of us are short on cash, in spite of working so hard. Corporations have a pay structure that rewards the very top of the organization with lavish payouts while paying most workers as little as possible. In fact, since the 1970s, pay for top executives has risen by 940 percent! And this happened while the salaries of the lowest-paid workers have stagnated or even decreased. We can get furious about these fat-cat executives, but we can also learn a thing or two from them. CEOs and top executives exude a sense of entitlement. They feel like they've earned their enormous salaries, stock options, and bonuses. And they're constantly asking for more. We could all benefit from confidence like that. It's true that if you ask for a raise you could be turned down. But if you never ask for anything, you'll never get a yes. When the author went out on her own as a consultant, she was determined to do good in the world instead of supporting terrible labor practices at big corporations. But many of the NGOs which approached her for help didn't offer compensation. Her business was flailing without any real income and her debt started spiraling. She realized that in order to really make a difference, she first needed to create a stable foundation for her business. So she hired a financial advisor and started budgeting. She cut out the luxury hotels and hair appointments and put everything she had into paying off her debts. She also started becoming comfortable with asking for more compensation. If a nonprofit wanted her to speak and claimed they couldn't pay her fee, she'd ask if they could pay her in other ways. For example, by introducing her to potential new sponsors or clients or giving her high-quality footage of the event and free publicity. As she got her financial house in order, her business flourished. Paying off her debt gave her the freedom to take on projects that really interested her. And she could authentically teach people how to advocate for themselves because she actively does it for herself.

When you're stuck in a rut, learn something new.

Imagine having a job with so little to do that you can wander around museums all day. That's what happened to the author when she had a cushy gig in Chicago. There was so little actual work to do that she showed up after 10:00 a.m., and then left for long lunches and walks around the city. That might sound like your dream job, but in reality, it wasn't much fun. Everyone likes to feel a sense of purpose and connection. And with nothing to do, she started to feel bored and aimless. She was also lonely - there was no one to talk to. And she felt guilty that she was wasting so much time. One day, a colleague suggested she use her time to get an advanced certification in HR. Laurie signed up and discovered that it was the challenge she'd been looking for. Studying for

the HR certificate gave her the sense of purpose she'd been missing. And it equipped her with new skills she could use in future workplaces. If you're feeling dissatisfied or stuck, then learning something new should be the very first thing you do. Cast your mind back to your last performance review, or perhaps the feedback you got after an interview. Perhaps you were told that you lacked leadership skills, or needed to improve your knowledge of a computer program. Choose one thing you want to improve and then look for some courses. There's so much free information online that money doesn't have to be an impediment. Consult YouTube, or do free LinkedIn courses. Just make sure you learn something new. The very best way to make sure you keep growing is to find a good mentor. Look around you and think about who you admire in your company. Is there a boss with exceptional empathy and business acumen? Or a senior colleague who models good boundaries between her work and personal life? Then these are people you should nurture relationships with and learn from. Good mentors don't even have to be people you know. You can learn a lot by watching how someone like Oprah Winfrey has built her career and take inspiration from her. Learning something new will give you a sense of accomplishment and purpose, even if you're in a dead-end job.

Be a smart job seeker.

If you didn't inherit a goldmine, then chances are you've had to look for a job at some stage in your life. Most of us have engaged in multiple job hunts, looking for a better cultural fit, or more money, or just to escape an office bully. Job hunting is never easy, and it can take its toll on even the most resilient of us. Multiple rejections and uncertainty activate all your insecurities and can make you miserable. Unfortunately, your prospective employers will definitely pick up on that sense of desperation. So, the first thing to do in any job hunt is to prioritize your well-being and work on a positive mindset. Smart job seekers don't take the hunt personally. They know that rejection is part of the game and have developed ways to regulate their own emotions. What the author calls "squishy job seekers," on the other hand, interpret rejections as meaning there's something wrong with them. They get stuck in their own pain and start feeling like the world is out to get them. As you can imagine, that's not the ideal mindset for getting a job. In order to survive the job-hunting marathon, you need to build resilience and prioritize your own well-being. You need to be a smart job seeker. Make sure you're eating properly, sleeping enough, and exercising regularly. Make time for friends and family and activities that remind you that your value isn't defined by your work. Prioritizing self-care won't only make the job hunt more pleasurable, it'll be more successful too. When you're searching for a job, the most important thing you can do is build real relationships. Instead of frantic networking, connect with other job seekers and share tips and advice. Or try mentoring a younger colleague. Acts of service build community and enhance your reputation. You never know who might be your "in" to the next great job. When you do get to the interview stage, make it as easy as possible for the people to hire you. What that means is: dress professionally and prepare for the interview. Turn off your phone and make sure you're mentally present and engaged. And make sure to ask for feedback before you leave. Asking whether your interviewers have any concerns or unanswered questions gives you the chance to address issues on the spot.

Never quit in a rage.

You've heard of the proverbial last straw to break the camel's back. Something

seemingly small can happen at work and suddenly you know that it's time to leave. For one of the author's clients, that moment came when his company took away his office and made him work from a noisy cubicle in an open setting instead. For you, it could be that you're fed up with being passed over again for promotion. Or simply that your commute is too long. Whatever your reason, sometimes the best thing to do is quit. But, like anything you do in your career, you need to do it strategically. It might feel good to storm into your boss's office and tell him he's an asshole, but leaving on bad terms is never a good idea. That's something one rash employee learned to his detriment. He'd written a very rude letter of resignation to his boss. His boss forwarded that message to management at the new company he was planning to work for. The new company rescinded his employment offer and he was left with no job at all. Whatever your feelings about the company, make sure you resign with good grace. And make sure you always have a backup plan before you take the plunge. That could be a healthy nest egg to support your entrepreneurial venture or a new job offer. Sure, secretly searching for a new job while you're still working at the old place can be tough. But having no income for months on end will be even harder. When you're ready to quit, make sure to negotiate your own severance package. That's right, you can get compensation even when you resign - if you play your cards right. HR departments never admit to this, but many companies are happy to pay you off if you leave quietly. If you're unhappy at work because it's a bad fit, or you're doing things you never signed up for, then discuss that with your boss and let him know you're willing to quit if you have severance pay to support your job search. Make sure you've done your research and practiced how to convincingly argue your case. Sure he can say no. Or in the worst-case scenario, even fire you on the spot. But if you're planning to leave the company anyway, you don't have much to lose. And you have everything to gain if he agrees.

Become the HR department you want to see in the world.

The day the author saw one of her bosses having sex with his secretary is the day she became cynical about the world of HR. Her boss had forgotten to draw the curtains and so, the whole company got to see him and his secretary entangled in a passionate embrace. She asked her manager what the HR department would do about the situation. But her manager just shrugged and said the department wouldn't be getting involved because it was "above their pay grade." So HR did nothing. And not long afterward, the secretary lost her job in a convenient restructuring. Doing nothing meant that the HR department had failed to protect a vulnerable employee from bearing the consequences of the affair. Ideally, HR departments make workplaces fairer, safer places to be for all employees. They protect the rights of women and people of color. They work to counter discrimination and enforce equal pay rules. And they make sure that hiring and promotion processes are equitable and transparent. Some HR departments are like that. But sadly, most aren't. So don't wait for the perfect HR department to help you in your career. Become your own HR cheerleader instead, and help yourself. For example, if you get a new job then don't expect HR to assist you with onboarding. Many companies just thrust a laptop into your hands and make you watch a workplace safety video. But real onboarding should be about making connections with your future colleagues. After all, it's those relationships which will make your new job bearable. So, take matters into your own hands, and start connecting with your new team on LinkedIn before you even begin work. When you start your job, ask yourself questions that a great HR department would ask you if it really cared about your well-

being. Questions like, Does this work align with my values? What makes me get up every day and come into the office? And what do I get from my work? Answering these questions will allow you to define your sense of purpose: the why that fuels your days. Your well-being and sense of purpose matter. Your dreams and ambitions matter. Even if your HR department doesn't acknowledge that, you can. You can bet on yourself.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: There's a big chance that your job will make you miserable at some point. But no matter what situation you're in, you always have the power to make it better. Stop allowing your life to be ruled by work, and make space for the things that give you joy and fulfillment. Get your finances in order. And learn how to take calculated risks and become a pragmatic dreamer. You may be let down by your bosses and HR department, but you can always root for yourself. And here's some actionable advice: Get the timing right when you ask for a raise or promotion. Most companies have set times of the year when they approve requests for raises or promotions. You should do some research and find out when those are to maximize your chances of having your request approved. You can make the most convincing pitch in the world, but if your timing is off, it's very unlikely that you'll get what you want.