

Passage 1. *Teresa Belton argues for the value of boredom.*

- 1 Being trapped in a tedious job, with no possibility of escape, is a recipe for real boredom. This kind of boredom is unpleasant and definitely bad for us. But a flurry of recent media interest on the subject of boredom suggests that it is a frequent experience that really bothers people and is not limited to the workplace. This must tell us something about contemporary life. 5
- 2 One of the defining features of today's culture is the near ubiquity of mobile digital technology, and smart phones in particular. To be able to be transported to any time or place, real or virtual, to access unlimited information and entertainment, or to carry out unfettered communication, is an extraordinary possibility, with untold positive potential. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of people now sense that constant connection is not good for them and feel the need for a "digital detox". 10
- 3 Turning to one's smart phone in order to fill or kill time in the hiatuses of life has become a widespread, unthinking habit, an automatic response to a lull in activity. It is a distraction from the impatience of waiting for time to pass. Paradoxically, such an attempt to avoid boredom, may, it seems, actually result in a kind of dissatisfaction, which is itself experienced as boredom. 15
- 4 In our hectic lives, in which we are bombarded by attention-grabbing external stimuli, the chance, instead, to withdraw for a while is an important opportunity to recharge mental batteries. Moments when there seems to be "nothing to do" are times when we can turn inwards, to reestablish our relationship with ourselves and cultivate an inner life. 20
- 5 We can revisit past experiences, enjoy them afresh, maybe see them in a different light and gain new understanding, or rethink future plans. Such times also offer us the chance to be fully in the here and now. We can look around and notice new details, developing our familiarity with our own environment and our sense of belonging to it and it to us. This is important for well-being. A longer period with time on our hands can lead to the discovery of a new interest – if it is not frittered away with distractions. 25
- 6 While boredom signifies a lack of stimulus, gaps and pauses in engagement are potentially of great personal value. People who fully appreciate this are those who say they never get bored: they are always able to find something that interests them to think about or do, or can find contentment in simply being. In business parlance, time is money, but time has its own intrinsic value. We need to learn to appreciate and enjoy raw time as a precious resource. 30
- 7 Viewing unassigned time as a positive asset encourages the development of inner resources, such as curiosity, playfulness, imagination, perseverance and agency, out of which all sorts of fulfilling activities can emerge. In fact, a number of professionals in the creative industry have spoken of the benefit of being idle for their craft. For example, novelist Neil Gaiman finds that getting really bored is the best way to come up with new ideas, and because constant social networking makes boredom impossible, he committed himself to a period offline. 35
- 8 Farmers learnt long ago that land which is allowed to lie fallow from time to time becomes more productive. It seems that the same can be true of the human mind. 40

Adapted from <https://theconversation.com/why-boredom-can-be-good-for-you-90429>

Passage 2. *David Robson highlights why boredom is mostly bad for you.*

- 1 I have met lots of people with a talent to bore in my time, but psychologist Sandi Mann is one of the few to have honed it as a craft. Eager volunteers visiting her lab may be asked to carry out less-than-thrilling chores like copying out lengthy lists of telephone numbers. They mostly tolerate the task politely, she says, but their shuffling bottoms and regular yawns prove they are hardly relishing the experience. Their agony is Science's gain, though, since Mann wants to understand the profound effect that boredom may have on our lives. 5
- 2 Boredom, it turns out, can be a dangerous and disruptive state of mind that damages your health – and even cuts years off your lifespan. Almost from the very beginning, it became clear that this state of mind could push people to harm themselves; a proneness to boredom was linked to a tendency to smoke, drink too much, and take drugs. Indeed, in one study, boredom was the single biggest predictor of alcohol, cigarette and cannabis use among a group of South African teenagers. That is not to mention more mundane but equally unhealthy behaviours, such as comfort-eating your way through tedium. The overall effect of boredom on your life expectancy could be drastic too. When researchers in the famous Whitehall study followed the lives of middle-aged civil servants in the UK, they found that the people who are most likely to get bored were 30% more likely to have died over the next three years. 10 15
- 3 Boredom often goes with a naturally impulsive mindset among people who are constantly looking for new experiences. For these people, the steady path of life just is not enough of a rollercoaster to hold their attention. The second kind of bored people have almost exactly the opposite problem; the world is a fearful place, and so they shut themselves away and try not to step outside their comfort zone. While this retreat might offer some comfort, they are not always satisfied with the safety it offers – and chronic boredom results. 20
- 4 Admittedly, we should be cautious about looking for an immediate escape from boredom. While boredom stops us ploughing the same old furrow, and pushes us to try to seek new goals or explore new territories or ideas, that search for an escape could push us to take risks that eventually hurt us - such as seeking pain, seemingly to break up the tedium. This same search for an escape explains why bored people turn to unhealthy behaviours. We need to listen to the emotion and ask what it is trying to tell us to do. 25
- 5 One unhealthy behaviour is that boredom may drive people to look for instant gratification on a smartphone or tablet, which is counter-productive. As we live in a technologically-driven society, boredom is dangerous because, in the process of trying to overcome it, it leads us to become overstimulated – we are constantly yanked around by interruption. That puts us on a kind of treadmill – we keep on expecting quicker and easier ways to revive our curiosity in a bid to overcome boredom. But this actually makes people more bored. 30 35
- 6 It would be wise to question whether there are more serious, long-term issues that are causing us to feel disengaged. Priming people to feel their lives have a greater purpose and meaning tends to make them less bored. Although our feelings of tedium during a work meeting or family gathering might seem superficial annoyances, they could therefore be a symptom of a deeper existential crisis and need for fulfilment that extends far beyond immediate circumstances. That could be as good a reason as any to re-evaluate your life, what you are trying to achieve with it, and to rethink what you actually mean when you say you are bored. 40

Adapted from <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20141218-why-boredom-is-good-for-you>

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