

Waking up is hard to do when a job's unfit for you

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GLOBE AND MAIL UPDATE

For most of his career, Tom White says he was "living in the world of could have been."

Over 23 years, Mr. White held senior management titles in audit and internal treasury operations at several big Canadian banks. In each of them, however, the problem was the same: "I hated what I was doing," Mr. White says.

"I would wake up in the morning not wanting to go to work. I found I wasn't getting intellectual challenge and there weren't really any opportunities to change or move higher."

He dreamed of a career with less bureaucracy, more autonomy and more opportunity to innovate. Though he kept telling himself he could have that dream job, he never took action to find it.

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Tom White spent 23 years hating his job at big banks, but has now taken steps to do the work that he wants. *(Aranxa Cedillo for the Globe and Mail)*

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That's an all-too-common story, says Tim Cork. Almost every day, the president of Toronto-based career coaching company NEXCareer Inc. sees executive clients who have stayed in a familiar rut rather than pursue jobs that would better use their skills, meet their goals or have them doing what they really love to do, he says.

Too many people coast along in their careers like bored students, getting by with mediocre marks -- even though they are capable of scoring straight As, Mr. Cork says.

Those As are captured in the title of his new book, *Tapping the Iceberg: Achieve Straight As in Life Through Attitude, Aptitude and Action*.

And by working on these three things every day you can create your ideal career:

Attitude. You choose your attitude, so choose enthusiasm and confidence, which you'll have in abundance if you're

working toward a goal that embodies your dreams, your strengths and what you love to do, Mr. Cork says.

Aptitude. Beyond your skills and previous experience, you should be gaining new experiences and meeting new people who will help you broaden your career options.

Action. Your dreams can't become reality until you set a plan to achieve them in motion.

"It's not just one, it's the combination of all three that will get you on a career path that's right for you," Mr. Cork adds.

And these are steps that you should be taking even if you are content in your current job, notes Mary-Frances Fox, president of Work Creatively Career Advisors Inc. in Toronto. You should never define yourself narrowly because no career is secure -- especially if your industry has seen recent mergers or downsizing.

"If you stick with the tried-and-true domain, you are closing off your long-term career potential," she warns. If the job you know disappears, you had better be ready with the mindset and the skills to move on to something else. "There may be more stability in questioning the status quo and changing to a career you love," she says.

Finding out what you really love is the basis of creating an action plan to develop your attitude and aptitude to make that change, Mr. Cork says.

His recommendations include:

Create a love list. Make a list of 10 or more things you love doing. Then make sure the items are at the foundation of any work you aspire to.

Visualize your dream. Write down a description of your vision of success and picture it in your mind regularly so you can compare it to the opportunities that may arise.

Learn more about yourself. Take psychological and aptitude tests that will identify your top skills, which may suggest new possibilities.

Create a plan. Write down the actions you need to take to achieve your dream position and deadlines for achieving each action.

Network broadly. Make connections beyond your narrow field to raise new opportunities you might not have thought about.

Keep learning. Read books, go to seminars and training sessions and invest in continually learning new skills.

Take it step by step. Grand goals challenge and push you but if you set the bar too high initially, you'll be continually frustrated. It's better to set achievable steps, then move on to more challenging ones.

Get support. It's not easy to stay committed to change on your own. It helps to have a mentor, a coach or a partner to offer support and hold you accountable.

Don't look back. It's human nature to backtrack but this should be about looking ahead to a more satisfying future.

Have patience. Change is a process that takes time to achieve.

Such steps helped Mr. White get a clear sense of his new career path. With the cushion of an earlier severance package, he voluntarily left his most recent bank job to reassess his future.

After investing in aptitude tests, hiring a career coach and studying potential career options in consulting, private equity and finance, Mr. White thinks he's found a job closer to his dreams.

Next week, he begins anew as a finance manager with mortgage insurance company AIG United Guaranty. He's looking forward to the challenge with fresh enthusiasm because it is a smaller organization that affords him the autonomy, ability to innovate and opportunities for advancement that he craves.

"Most people advised I shouldn't take a year out of my career to do a re-evaluation. But I thought to myself, here I am at 47, in mid-career. I always said I was going to do work that was right for me and I haven't, so now's the time to reassess and do it right," he says.

"I'm no longer going with the flow," Mr. White adds. "'Could have' doesn't cut it for me any more. Now I'm setting my own course."

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