

“Ask yourself whether your struggle is more about the process of change and transition and less about the job itself.”

When That “Perfect” Gig Hides a Few Snags

Beating New Job Blues

by *brenda m. melvin*

Faith Thompson* was ecstatic. After several rounds of interviews and extensive reference checks, she finally got the call. The job—to create a top-notch human resources department for a growing nonprofit organization—was hers. But within weeks, Thompson’s initial excitement turned into despair. She was miserable. She was sure she had made a mistake.

“It started when I was asked to become moving manager, then event caterer and cleaning lady, and finally undercover cop,” Thompson recalls. The day-to-day reality of the job was not at all what she had bargained for. Her attempts to talk to her manager were not taken seriously, and her efforts to facilitate change were stalled by organizational politics. She stuck it

out for a few months and ultimately resigned.

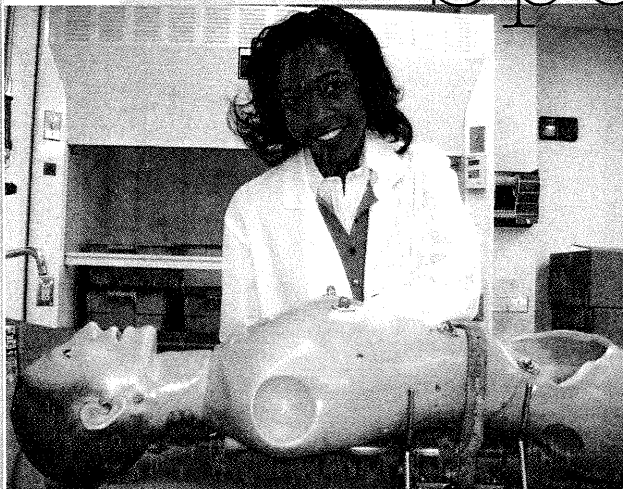
Stepping into a new job can be overwhelming and stressful under the best circumstances. You may encounter long hours, difficulty connecting with your new colleagues or, like Thompson, responsibilities that are not what you expected. Whatever the issue, it is possible to beat the new job blues, or avoid them altogether, by being prepared before you embark on your job search and being proactive once you arrive.

“Before you look for a job, take the time to write an ‘ideal job description,’” advises Rosemarie Rowley, a New York City recruitment consultant and career coach. “The description should incorporate your learned skills, God-given talents, desired responsibilities, target compensation range and preferred work environment.” This road map will help you clarify what criteria are and are not negotiable and will allow you to evaluate all aspects of a potential position. “You need to be brutally honest in your assessment. While no job is perfect, if you think it satisfies the majority of your ideal job description, you should pursue it,” Rowley says.

Been there, done that and still feeling blue? The situation may still be salvageable. For one thing, patience pays. “Ask yourself whether your struggle is more about the process of change and transition and less about the job itself,” says Atlanta career coach Hallie Crawford. “Sometimes we make knee-jerk

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Spotlight



treat gastrointestinal diseases. Larkin designs experiments to test equipment on non-human subjects. “Our goal is to make sure equipment is safe.”

Preparation: Larkin minored in biology at Cleveland State. After college, she was a research associate searching for differences in the brains of people with psychological disorders and managed a pre-clinical project to improve stroke treatments.

Salary: Mid-\$40s for entry-level researchers; \$50,000 to \$70,000 for those with more experience. Management could earn six figures.

Others should know: “Everybody expected me to go to medical school. That was never my intention,” she says. “Clinical research is a wide-open field. I’ve had the opportunity to be part of very dynamic research.”—*Carolyn White*

Lisa Larkin, 29
Framingham, Massachusetts

Job: Pre-clinical research associate, Boston Scientific Corporation, a manufacturer of medical devices

Responsibilities: Larkin works in the endoscopy division as part of a team that develops products to help physicians

PHOTO: STOCKBYTE; ILLUSTRATION: TINA HEALEY/STOCK ILLUSTRATION; ABOVE PHOTO: YELLOW DOG PRODUCTIONS; BELOW: RONALD BARBOZA FOR HEART & SOUL

decisions based on discomfort with change. Give yourself a time frame, say three months, to try it. If you're still unhappy and convinced you are in the wrong job, consider a move." Cynthia Brown, a senior human resources executive for a major media company, agrees: "Many times it takes a few months to get acclimated to the culture and work environment." She recommends working with your manager early to develop a structured 30-, 60- and 90-day plan to confirm expectations. Include specific goals and timelines for checking progress. Also, don't be quick to dismiss undesirable tasks.

"Flexibility is important," Brown says. "Some of the non-interesting work may actually serve the purpose of orienting you to the company and its operations. Clarify the intent with your manager. Mention the duties that were discussed during the interview process that don't appear to be a part of the position. State why they are important to you and how you are anxious to apply your skills in those areas." If it appears the job was misrepresented, consider leaving, but only after exploring all options to use your talents: volunteer for team projects or champion an idea to streamline a process.

If rapport with colleagues is the problem, learn more about their roles. Brown suggests talking to someone you clicked with during the interview process to gain further insight regarding challenging personalities.

If you do decide to move on, proceed with caution. Re-focus on what you want in a job. Learn to trust your instincts when they alert you to subtle red flags that can be glaring in hindsight, as Thompson discovered. "Looking back on the interview process, it was mentioned that the organization was looking for someone to bring a sense of order but not too much structure. I should have listened to that!" Thompson has since found her true dream job, and she no longer sings the blues. ❖

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