

Q&A Column
Author: Mark Swartz

Email Subject Line: Stayed On The Job Too Long?

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Headline: How Long Is Too Long In One Job?

Summary:

Question: I have been with a company for over eight years and moved from Sales rep to team lead to Sales Manager. I make good money but that is not making me happy. Am I burning out? Recently I was totally passed over for recognition and someone who was assisting me received it. How long is too long to stay at a company.?

Name Withheld by Request, Buffalo, New York

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Headline: How Long Is Too Long In One Job?

Dear Mark,

Question: I have been with a company for over eight years and moved from Sales rep to team lead to Sales Manager. I make good money but that is not making me happy. Am I burning out? I feel no drive to work and my only goal is to just get paid and pass the day. Once I was an eager member of the Management team and always looking to take on added responsibility. Recently I was totally passed over for any recognition and someone who was assisting me received it. How long is too long to stay at a company?

Name Withheld by Request, Buffalo, New York

Dear Reader,

In some ways it's almost like asking "how long is a piece of string?" There are several viewpoints to take into account in considering your question.

Let's start with your existing employer, since they're paying your salary. How might *they* answer this question? Probably along the lines of "If you're dragging yourself in every morning, and your output is dropping noticeably, then we may just have a real problem here." Their concern is that not only will your productivity keep declining, but your attitude will show outwardly and bring your co-workers down too.

The big question in your boss's mind is whether your current slump is temporary, or if it signals that you've peaked. Think about it – someone who was assisting you caught management's eye and earned recognition. What was that person doing that you no longer are bothering to?

From your own point of view, the questions to ask yourself could include:

- Do I truly dislike my job, or is it more about current circumstances that may be temporary in nature?
- Am I really burned out, or do I simply need a good vacation, or a change of roles, to perk me up again?
- Am I still learning, growing and stretching or have I stagnated?

- Can I afford to let my lack of enthusiasm show through for much longer, or am I putting my job in peril?

Now let's take this from the standpoint of a potential new employer if you leave your present job. What will they be looking for in terms of longevity in previous roles? Depends very much on what they value. There are some very dynamic, young firms where more than four to five years there and you're like a fossil. At the other extreme are places where 20 years' seniority is like, "is that all?"

One piece of advice I would like to leave you with. If you do end up trying to jump ship, any new employer worth their salt will want to know what you've been doing these past few years to keep yourself up to date. They'll look for initiative on your part that demonstrates a commitment to professional development. So...if you do stay put for now, at least try to maybe take some courses, pick up your tempo, and leave on a high note.