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Underemployment: Getting & Staying Out of the Rut

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Are you among the millions of Americans who suffer from underemployment? Topping the nation's list of causes for worker dissatisfaction, underemployment is the absence of a meaningful career challenge in a position that does not fully utilize the employee's talents and skills. These professionals are no longer intellectually stimulated by their current positions and consequently, are bored and disinterested in their work.

The key to getting or staying out of this rut is self-motivation. No one is going to see to it that you rise to your potential except you! By following a few of the key actions listed below, you can take control of your own situation and motivate yourself out of underemployment.

Transform your attitude. Have you noticed that it always seems that people with a positive outlook on life are happy with their jobs? What comes first: the attitude or the fantastically rewarding position? Don't underestimate the power of a positive attitude. Learn to look at the glass as half full instead of half empty. When you do, a problem becomes an opportunity; a barrier becomes a challenge; and a burden becomes a privilege. Change your body language. Body language and moods are so closely connected that consciously altering your body language can change your mood. When you are feeling discouraged, stand up straight, walk confidently and smile. Soon you will find yourself more energized and motivated.

Evaluate your situation and develop a list of possible actions to improve it.

Situation: You were laid off thanks to your company being acquired or downsized. You are forced to take a lower responsibility job to make ends meet, and your talents are not being utilized.

Possible actions:

- Think of your current job as an interim assignment until you find a better match. Land a position that is better aligned with your background and career plan.
- Volunteer in the community to maintain your people skills and make new connections.
- Focus on keeping your professional and personal contacts network healthy by making it a point to get in touch with them.

Situation: You have been in the same position for too long. Your employer is fostering your underemployment by giving you more of the same work without added responsibility. Besides the negative repercussions of professional stagnation, you'll eventually become a dinosaur as your salary rises without expanding your position, making you overpaid for your skills.

Possible actions:

- Complete your current workload in an efficient manner. Delegate tasks when possible, freeing up time to volunteer for new and interesting projects that allow you to extend your skills.
- Consider a lateral move into a different area. Concentrating on a new aspect of the business will renew your enthusiasm and strengthen your resume.
- Further your education/training. Earn an industry designation. Work on your advanced degree. Attend a special skills seminar. Utilize this newly obtained knowledge to look at your role from a different perspective.
- Begin an active job search. Look for a position that will challenge you and allow you to grow.

Create goals and put them in writing. After choosing your desired action, write goals, breaking down your ultimate goal into smaller objectives with specific, achievable deadlines. These sub goals allow for small victories – keeping you motivated as you check things off your task list and move



closer to your desired result. Keep this list in a place where you will see it everyday. It is embedded in our minds that written contracts are binding; being reminded of this self-contract daily will be motivation in itself.

Seek inspiration and support. Find a family member or friend to hold you accountable for the goals you created. A cheerleader and a coach, this accountability buddy will praise your small accomplishments and urge you on through tough times.

Celebrate your accomplishments. Create a reward system. Reward even the smallest achievements on your path to success. Subconsciously, this will motivate you to complete the next task.