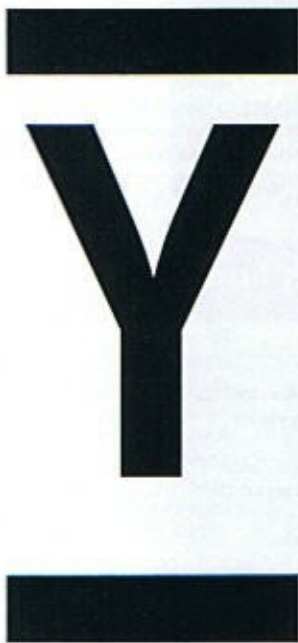


**LOVE  
THE  
ONE  
YOU'RE  
WITH**

The most wonderful  
cubicle in the world  
might just be your own.  
*By* RACHEL POMERANCE





**YOUR BOSS IS IRRITATING**, your workload is debilitating, and your office is a fluorescent-lit hell on earth. Look at it this way: At least you've got an office. Many of Atlanta's biggest companies are cutting costs by eliminating hundreds—even thousands—of jobs (see chart, page 74). Competition is intense for the jobs that do exist. The Troup County Kia plant set to open in 2009 had more than 43,000 applications during its thirty-day recruiting period; DeKalb County's new Wal-Mart drew more than 16,000 jobseekers; and Gwinnett County Public Schools was flooded with more than 2,500 applications after announcing it had openings for teachers.

Unemployment insurance claims in metro Atlanta climbed 34.6 percent in the last year (from 12,927 in March 2007 to 17,402 this March), and metro Atlanta lost about 39,100 payroll jobs between December 2007 and January 2008. While Tom Darrow, principal of Talent Connections and former president of the Atlanta chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management, expects the economy to improve by summer's end as companies cut costs and election results become clearer, Dr. Rajeev Dhawan, director of Georgia State University's Economic Forecasting Center, is less optimistic. He notes that as consumers slow their spending due to soaring gas prices, dipping home values, or job losses, the hospitality, retail, and tourism industries will feel the squeeze. Government and healthcare industries, on the other hand, add jobs even in a downturn.

But wait . . . before you start filling out that civil servant application, ask yourself if this is really the best time to quit your day job. Are there, instead, steps you can take to make the most of your current situation? Could you find a way to (gasp) actually love and find fulfillment in your current job? Anything's possible.

"To make the most of the job you have right now, **treat it as if you are your own business**—as if you are self-employed, and your current client is your current employer," advises business and life coach Martha Carnahan, Atlanta co-president of the Georgia

Coach Association. Rather than letting the economic environment make you feel trapped in your position, rethink and take control of the concept of job security. If you're approaching your work as if you own it, says Carnahan, you're investing in your reputation and contribution. Job security stems from your talent and expertise, factors that are within your control. Your career is larger than your current position, which is simply a temporary opportunity to grow and create better opportunities when the time comes to move on.

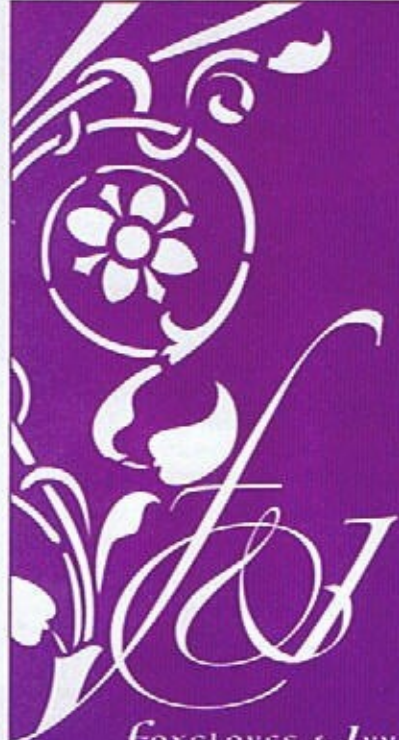
"Well, I'm not growing professionally at work. In fact, I'm awfully bored." Sound like you? That's fixable too. **If you're bored, don't add lazy to the equation.** Find yourself another challenge or two. According to John Lucht, executive recruiter and bestselling author of books on career growth and change, tackling new problems and broadening your skill set can not only boost your sense of self-satisfaction but can also move you from a narrowly specialized job that's chopped when the axe falls to a "dual-purpose job" more likely to survive layoffs.

Enrolling in executive training is another way to stave off tedium. "That's an area I think a lot of people ignore," says career coach John Long. "They don't seek continuing professional development in the form of seminars and workshops and conferences that will keep them engaged in the field that they're in and keep them in touch with the latest and greatest information [that would allow] them to progress in their career."

Perhaps you have the reverse predicament. You can't imagine being bored at work because you're so wound up that you forget to take bathroom breaks. Two words: fresh air. Darrow recommends taking a lunchtime walk with a coworker. Even a brief exercise break can reduce the production of stress hormones, pump up your endorphins, improve your mood, and give you perspective. A study from Leeds Metropolitan University in England found that 65 percent of workers had increased mental and interpersonal performance, time-management abilities, and productivity on days when they used their company gym for just forty-five to sixty minutes at lunchtime. **So yes, you're busy, maybe even overworked, but if that brief break will increase your productivity and focus for the rest of the day, it all evens out.** Besides, as Darrow reminds us, "You have to break up your environment a little. You can't just sit in the cube all day long."

When you do have to be in your cube or office, make it as pleasant as possible. Feng shui expert Tracy Miller of Gazelle Feng Shui says positioning your desk correctly is the first step to making your office a more enjoyable environment. "You should have a solid wall behind you and be facing the door but not directly across from it," she says. Your phone should be on the right if you're right-handed, and items you use frequently should be nearby. It sounds like common sense, but Miller says, "I see people get up all the time to get something they always use. Another thing I see all the time is people working right under fluorescent lighting. That creates more headaches than you can imagine." Miller advises

Continued on page 126



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## Love the One ...

Continued from page 73

office inhabitants to **replace the harsh fluorescent glare with the softer glow of an incandescent lamp**. As an extra treat to your computer-weary eyes, try a black pad beneath your notepad to add depth to the writing field. Having something live in your office is also nice, she says, whether it's a fishbowl, a plant, or just a bowl of water with a fresh flower floating in it. "Get something you have to care for to bring the outside in. If you absolutely can't, a painting of a landscape or other natural scene works, but it's not nearly as effective."

If you're a cube dweller who can't rearrange your desk, don't fret. There are other ways to make your cubicle feng shui compliant. Since your back probably faces the "door" of your cube, **place a small mirror near your computer so you can see what's going on behind you**. If you're into balancing the energy, try putting a water feature of some sort in the northern corner of your cube to improve your career, or a wood-related item such as a fresh plant in the southeast corner for money.

Even the most beautifully decorated cube or office loses its appeal when your boss is in the doorway, asking you to come in early again. Having difficulties or misunderstandings with your boss can taint your entire view of your workplace. Employees who gave low scores to their employers in our Best Places to Work survey often commented on difficulties with their company's management. To address the problem, **start by taking a good, honest look at the problems you're having with the head honcho**. Hate the way he heaps praise on the staff brownnoser or the way she slurps coffee at meetings? Well—here comes the tough love—get over it. Overlook the small idiosyncrasies to get to the bottom of what's really bothering you. "The key thing in an economy like we have now," says Darrow, "is to try to, to some degree, put the blinders on and let some of those challenges roll off your back and just do your job . . . Have a reality check, and don't make the problem bigger than it really is."

Even difficulties that appear more serious may simply be the result of miscommunication. For example, one of Carnahan's clients went batty over her boss's tendency to hold closed-door meetings. She

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became consumed with worry over what she might be missing and began feeling marginalized. When she finally broached the issue with her boss, she found that he'd been trying to spare her the aggravation and distraction of hearing the meetings, and they were able to find a compromise that kept her informed about relevant issues. Straight talk is often the path to resolution. (If you're on the other side of the seesaw and are faced with managing a team of varied personalities, see our panel on page 70 for advice on keeping your employees motivated and fulfilled.)

Work/life balance—the phrase is bantered around HR circles so often that you may have learned to tune it out. That's a mistake. According to *BusinessWeek's* website, the average American works 1,966 hours a year, and leisure time has decreased by nearly a quarter in the last decade. **To achieve our non-work-related goals, we all have to focus more than ever on maintaining the elusive balance and making time for the things that matter to us.** It can be done. Former journalist Laura Sparks, thirty-two, realized that the disciplines that drew her to her current marketing job left too little time for her original love: writing. So rather than continuing to outsource so much of it, she decided to block off her mornings for writing, adjusting her job to save money and incorporate her passion. She's also enthusiastic about environmentalism, so she incorporated it into her job by bringing recycling bins to the office, toting them to the recycling center, and teaching coworkers about environmental issues with fun trivia games. By combining her job with her other interests, she's rewarded both personally and professionally.

But what about that other kind of reward . . . the cash kind? **Keep the current economic climate in mind when asking for a raise, and be honest with yourself about whether you've earned it**—needing a raise and earning it are two different concepts. “[People] overrate themselves as to what they think they're worth,” says Darrow. Expecting annual raises on the anniversary of your hire, for example, could be an error because, as Darrow reminds us, “we've evolved into more of a free-agent society” with market value determined by the quality of projects rather than by tenure alone. In other words, focus on producing great work and the rewards will come. ■



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