



## Job Satisfaction: It's about Fit

If you've ever worn shoes that were the wrong size, you know how uncomfortable that can be. You probably couldn't wait to kick off those misfits and put on your "go-to" shoes: they fit so well that it's like walking on air.

As you head out to work, is there a spring in your step? If so, it's probably because your work fits you well — just like your favorite shoes. Yet, many Americans, regardless of age or income bracket, say they are unhappy with their careers. That's not very good news. In fact, research indicates that only about half of U.S. workers are satisfied with their jobs. What's more, studies show that **job satisfaction is the most important factor in overall life satisfaction**.

Yet, the footnote to these studies acknowledges some good news...*many Americans like their jobs!* What do happy workers have in common? They have found their *fit* — which is the key to job satisfaction.

### What is Job Satisfaction?

To be happy in your career, there must be a fit between you, your job and the work environment. Therefore, overall job satisfaction is dependent upon a combination of *both* the intrinsic and extrinsic satisfiers you derive from your work.

***Intrinsic job satisfaction has to do with the work itself*** — that is, the job-related satisfiers. Intrinsic job satisfaction is highest when you:

- are able to use your talents and abilities to make a contribution,
- enjoy the day-to-day tasks of your job,
- like your role in the organization,
- do meaningful work,
- and feel valued.

***Extrinsic job satisfaction has to do with working conditions***. This includes organization-provided rewards such as salary, benefits, training, and opportunities for advancement. In addition to these organization-provided satisfiers, several other working conditions can impact job satisfaction (e.g., the organization's culture and values; working relationships with coworkers and managers).



## Fit & Performance

Remember those commercials from years ago? You'll "run faster and jump higher" if you just wear the right shoes. Maybe there's a bit of truth to that. Whether you're on the playground or at work, good fit leads to better performance. Here's why: job satisfaction is highest when there's fit between your abilities and the performance requirements of your job (*intrinsic satisfiers*) and you're reasonably content with the working conditions (*extrinsic satisfiers*). As job satisfaction increases, so does your motivation to achieve performance goals. And, as a result, your job performance soars.

Fit is important from an organizational standpoint as well. Employers that hire workers who fit the job requirements are better positioned to achieve business goals. So, it's a "win-win" for everyone.

## Finding Your Fit

What if you're in a job that doesn't fit? If you're no longer satisfied in your current job (or you were never happy with your work to begin with), there are steps you can take to find a better match:

### ✓ ***Know who you are and what you want.***

Think back to that time when you wore those uncomfortable shoes. You could have avoided all those blisters by taking an accurate measure of your shoe size. Similarly, in order to identify careers that could be a good fit for you, you need to know who you are. Explore your goals, interests, personality, values, skills, and — most of all — your aptitudes (natural talents). Through increased self-knowledge, you'll gain deeper awareness of your job-related (intrinsic) satisfiers.

Also, take time to contemplate what you want from your work. For example, perhaps you'd like a flexible work schedule. Or maybe you want to work in a specific geographic location. What are your salary requirements? Are you willing to travel?

Make a list of your ideal working conditions (*extrinsic job satisfiers*). Then separate the list into the things you *want* versus *need*. Be sure your list is realistic and be prepared to make some trade-offs. Even in the best of work environments, you might not be able to get *everything* you want.



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Knowing who you are and what you want from your work is a fundamental first step to finding career fit. Without self-awareness, it's not easy to identify career options that could be a good fit.

✓ ***Identify causes of job dissatisfaction.***

You need to figure out why you're not happy at work. Otherwise, there's a risk that you'll make uninformed choices that don't actually improve your circumstances or help you find more satisfying options. (It's sort of like those misfit shoes. If you don't know why they hurt your feet, a new pair might fit just as poorly.) Along similar lines, a basic gap analysis can help you determine the reasons why you're not happy with your work.

Here are some examples of questions to ask yourself to identify the root causals of your job dissatisfaction:

- ***Have my work tasks changed?*** You may be unhappy because the new tasks don't tap into your specific talents, abilities, and interests. If that's the case, look for other positions (internally or externally) that afford you the opportunity to perform work tasks you really enjoy. Or identify and develop the skills you need to transition into a different position that would be more satisfying for you.
- ***Have the organization-provided satisfiers changed?*** Your employer may be facing increased competition or costs that have impacted profitability and, in turn, their ability to maintain current salary and/or benefits packages. Analyze whether these changes are unique to your organization or if they're industry-wide. Also separate the kind of work you do from the working conditions. If you like your job, but the organization-provided satisfiers no longer fit your needs, you may opt to:
  - adjust to the changes (especially if your career is progressing in a positive direction and you anticipate advancement opportunities with your current employer)
  - or negotiate with your manager / employer for changes.

If neither of these options is realistic in your situation, search for similar positions with other organizations.

- ***Have I changed?*** Perhaps you've experienced personal changes or entered a new stage of life. Or maybe your needs have changed over time. Re-evaluate what's most important to you. Depending on how much things have shifted, a career change may be necessary.



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- ***Am I having a difficult time remaining objective in my gap analysis?*** If so, find a mentor who can give you realistic feedback and help you find developmental opportunities that more closely fit your work profile.
- ***Am I unable to determine the causes of my job dissatisfaction?*** Talk with a career counselor who can provide some guidance.

✓ ***Identify and research occupations that fit.***

Once you have a solid understanding of who you are and what you want (*and don't want*) in your job, identify career options that are a good fit for you. Compare your profile of talents, interests, personality, and values to the requirements of the jobs you're considering.

You can access profiles for more than 900 occupations through the U.S. Department of Labor's [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#), [O\\*NET](#), [CareerOneStop](#) and [Career Outlook](#). Also, read job postings for your targeted positions. You'll notice that an occupation's specific job tasks and work environment can vary a little, based on each employer's specific needs.

## **When the Shoe Fits...**

Job satisfaction is highest when there's a fit between you, your job, and the work environment. Ultimately, good career fit positively impacts career and life satisfaction. (In other words, if the shoe fits, you'll love wearing it!)