

# BostonWorks

VIEW FROM THE CUBE

## Many American employees feel they're entitled to 'fun' at work

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**M**y wife and I are relaxing on our back deck, sipping iced coffee and eating four-day-old bagels. We've just put our sons to sleep and we're chatting about our busy day at work. A few years ago I would've scoffed at the idea of eating a stale bagel. Now I'm able to find pleasure in simple, imperfect moments.

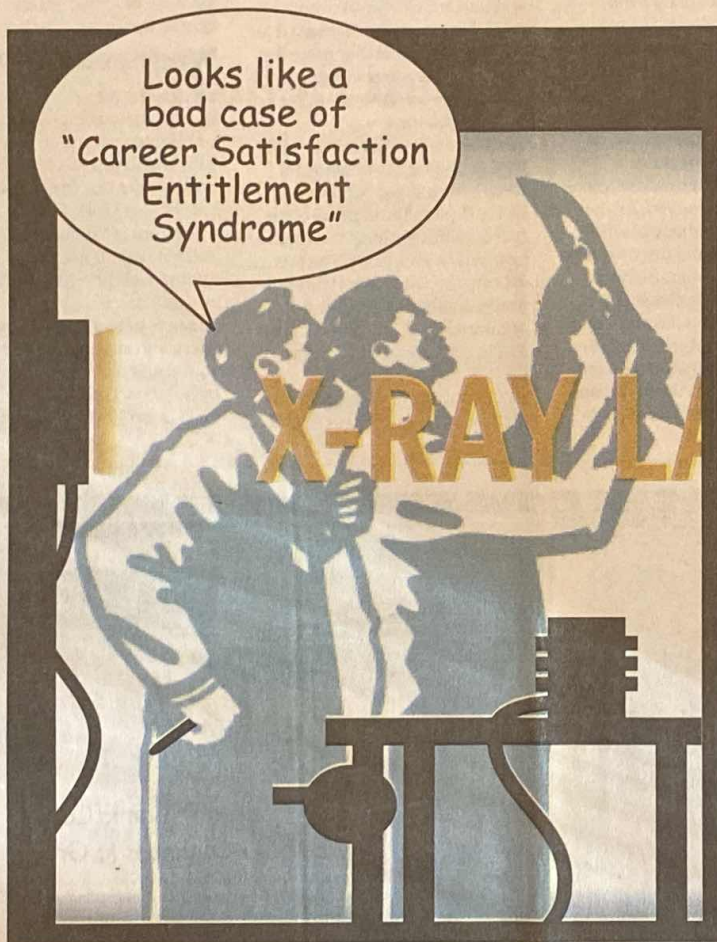
We both had lousy days. I had a small spat with a co-worker. My wife was stressed out about her usual staffing problems. Nothing major, but significant enough to make us question whether we want to continue where we work.

It's a discussion that I have daily with myself. Blame my mother — she may have done me a disservice when she encouraged me to go out into the world and find a job that makes me happy. Sounds weird, I know. But now I'm dysfunctional. I have a serious disorder. You will not find this condition in any medical journals — yet. I call it C.S.E.S., which is short for Career Satisfaction Entitlement Syndrome.

Simply defined, C.S.E.S. is a mutation of the widely held social tenet that each of us deserves to be happy, all of the time, in our work. It is a belief that someone other than yourself, or some force out of your control, is responsible for providing job happiness.

I have C.S.E.S. When things are a bit slow at work, I get an itching for a challenge. When I've had a cruddy day, I feel like it's time for a change. Over the last 10 years, I've worked for five different companies. I left each one, of my own accord, regardless of the fact that each was providing me with good money, health insurance, and some periodic novelty. I wanted more, and I wanted it constantly, so I moved on.

This is a modern ailment. My parents grew up in the years just following the Great Depression, where young adults were taught that the only thing worse than a job was no job at all. They felt lucky



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to be working. Whereas I spent my adolescence in the 1980s, listening to the sermons of career satisfaction gurus Tony Robbins, Stephen Covey, and Richard Bolles. Twenty years later, I still don't know what color my parachute is.

As a nation we seem to suffer from an obsession with wanting work to be con-

stantly entertaining, and it's masking the simple desire to do good work and robbing us of the joy that comes from a job well done. I put myself in the same group as the high school students who were asked by the Families and Work Institute to rate their most important job aspects. "A job that is fun," grabbed a whopping

76 percent importance rating. That's a lot of kids developing C.S.E.S. before they even enter the workforce.

We should take the youngest baby boomers, the Gen-Xers, the Why-Generation, and those new Millennium Kids and squish them into a new category called the Choice Generation. There are 500 cable channels to watch. Any type of food you want, any time of day or year. Don't want to attend public school? Fine. Visit a charter school or a private school, or just stay home with Dad to be home-schooled.

I'm not knocking any of these choices. In fact, the diversity is commendable and the benefits are obvious. But it's no wonder that an entire generation might expect to be satisfied in their careers — and get exactly what they want. Raised with the ability to customize every aspect of their life, they feel entitled to have fun at work.

Career Satisfaction Entitlement Syndrome is clearly a product of our short-attention-span culture. Every day has to be fulfilling. Work itself has become an extreme sport. If our job is to be satisfying, then it must give us an adrenaline rush. If not, then there must be something wrong.

The Declaration of Independence states that each one of us has the unalienable right to the pursuit of happiness. It does not say we are entitled to be happy. It just says we can search for happiness. If things aren't going well at work, if I don't like my job, then it is certainly my right to look elsewhere. But there is no guarantee that I will find satisfaction in the next job.

And so, we all continue to network and update our resumes. Even when work is going well, we're thinking about the next step. It seems like everyone is. I've caught a few of my colleagues searching the job Web sites despite the current outlook for our office, which is good. The subways are crammed with advertisement posters from local colleges, geared toward working adults. The posters shout, "Whatever you're doing, you could be doing better. You deserve more."

My job is great right now, but a corner of my mind is still thinking about a move. Don't I deserve better? Aren't I entitled to a little pleasure and recognition at work?

The sad answer is no. Nobody owes me anything. It's not my employer's job to entertain me constantly.

When my mother told me to find a job that made me happy, she didn't tell me that I'd have to do all of the legwork. But now I see what she was getting at. I have to define what makes me happy. That's a huge question. Who's got time to figure out the meaning of life? I also have to understand that happiness is an extreme. It comes and goes. Like job satisfaction, it's noticeable only by its absence. And, I have to find it myself.

So I'm dealing with my condition. I've gone through at least three lulls at work without updating my resume. I'm recognizing joy in the unexciting day-to-day stuff. Last Tuesday, our bookkeeper gave me some petty cash to go buy donuts for everyone. That was fun.

My Career Satisfaction Entitlement Syndrome is in remission. Instead of searching every day for work excitement, I'm learning to enjoy plain old work contentment. And it is within that contentment I find work satisfying.

Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski once wrote, "A job is like a baker's work. His rolls are tasty as long as they're fresh; after two days they're stale; after a week, they're covered with mold and fit only to be thrown out."

So, my wife and I sit, staring out toward the backyard, complaining about work. We're still stuffing our mouths with old bagels. They're not really that bad though. I've had so many now that I can't even tell the difference from a fresh one. Dab enough peanut butter on one and it's just as delicious. I'm content with it.

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