

Tools

This week at Boston.com/Monster

We've redesigned...

The site has changed, but our commitment to help you find a job hasn't. Stop by boston.com/monster to check out our recent redesign.

On Call: An online healthcare magazine

After nine years as a print magazine focused on healthcare and healthcare professionals in the Greater Boston area, On Call is now a Web-based publication. Check it out at boston.com/monster/healthcare/oncall

Student Center

Visit the Student Center for Globe and online-exclusive features, including for college freshman, hot new jobs, and internship opportunities. boston.com/monster/college

Break Room Student Center blog

Our bloggers discuss the experiences of applying for internships and first jobs, tips and advice for getting the best gigs, upcoming job events for recent grads, and more. Visit boston.com/monster/college for more information.

Career events

Each week find out about the latest career events and career fairs, at boston.com/monster/events

Job hunting?

Searching for a job? Look to these success stories for inspiration. Find out more at boston.com/monster.

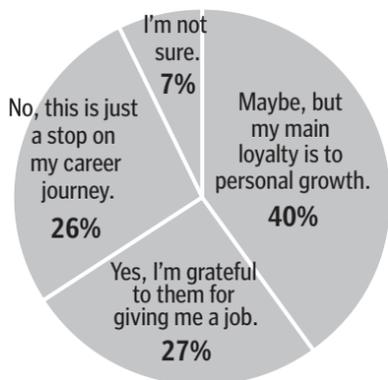
Post your resume

Post your resume online on boston.com/monster. Add multiple resumes for a variety of positions, and applying for jobs will only take a few clicks of the mouse. See all the resume services at boston.com/monster.

The job blog

The boston.com/monster staff keeps you updated with daily posts on the latest job news and information. Visit boston.com/monster/blog.

Do you feel a sense of loyalty to your current employer?

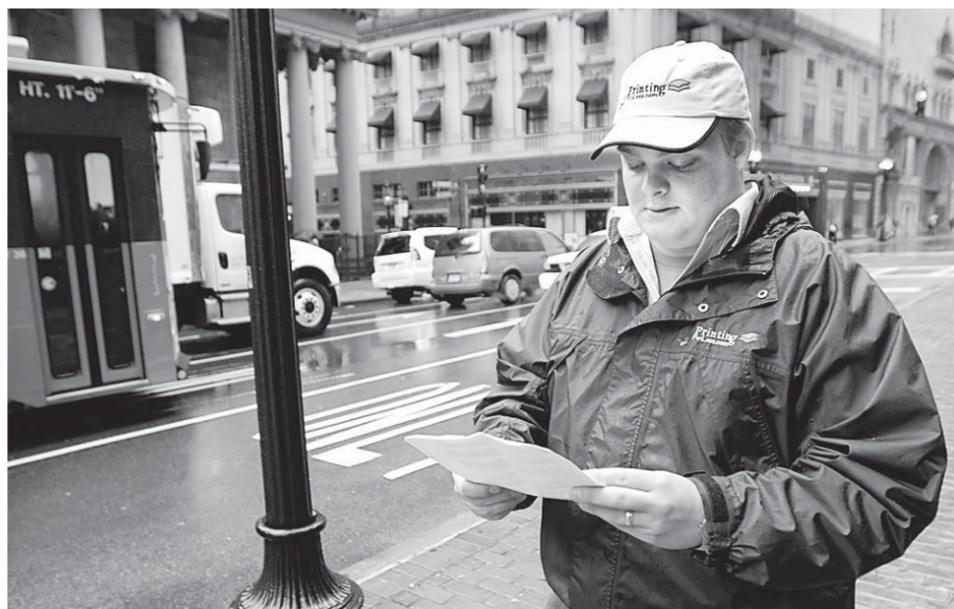


This week's question

How long did it take you to find a stable job after college?

Visit boston.com/monster to participate in the poll.

SOURCE: boston.com/monster poll



JOSH REYNOLDS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Wyeth Windham's (left) ability to skip out of a conference to walk Boston's Freedom Trail just might be a great lesson in career happiness.

Clear goals, feedback among attributes needed to be happy, productive at work

PENELOPE TRUNK Climb

A job cannot make you happy, but it can save your life. People spend so much time looking for that perfect job, the perfect boss, the salary that will finally make them feel secure. But in fact, the impact a job can have on your life is overrated. Unless your life is completely falling apart. Then a job can save you.

When we think about a job saving someone, we usually think about people in poverty. For example, Richard Easterlin, an economics professor at the University of Southern California, found that earning enough to pay for food and rent can change the lives of people in poverty — and give them the ability to achieve happiness. But he found that anything beyond around \$40,000 a year does not have much impact on your level of happiness.

The reason for this is that our happiness comes, for the most part, from the amount of optimism we have. Daniel Gilbert, in his book "Stumbling on Happiness," spends 300 pages talking about all the research that shows how misguided we are about our ideas of happiness. The biggest mistake is thinking we can influence it much. Mostly, we can't. Mostly we have no idea what will make us happy in the future — although we think we do.

What's the best way to influence your happiness? Personal relationships. People with strong, supportive personal relationships are happier than people who are isolated. The statistic that best shows this comes from Dartmouth College economics professor David Blanchflower. He says if you go from having no sex, to having sex once a week, you will have a large jump in happiness. This research isn't about orgasms. It's about forging reliable, steady relationships that you make time for every week. It's hard to measure that, but sex is a good way.

So back to the job. Imagine someone who hates her job. If she's fallen in love,

she'll have that glow about her even though her job is boring, because love trumps interesting work in the happiness charts. And imagine an inherently optimistic entrepreneur whose business fails? She probably starts another business, because an optimistic outlook often trumps reality, for better or worse.

Trying to influence your natural set point for optimism is like trying to influence your natural set point for weight. Your body pushes to go back to where it was, no matter how you try. So only the most extreme diet can move an inherently husky woman into skinny-girl mode. And only the most extreme job can move an inherently optimistic person into the realm of negativism.

Here are attributes the Economist says your job must have to make you feel productive and happy about your work:

1. Stretches a person without defeating him
2. Provides clear goals
3. Provides unambiguous feedback
4. Provides a sense of control

The range of jobs that meet these requirements is wide. And they include jobs you might not expect. For example, hairdressers report they fire clients who treat them poorly, and janitors say that they get feedback from the people who are happy the floors are clean. Conversely, lawyers report having little control over their goals since clients frequently change them, and that they have little control over outcome because they are beholden to a judge, jury, or ambiguous law.

So a job cannot make you happy, even if you wish it could. But it can save your life. People report that in times of extreme negativism and sadness — depression, poverty, or complete lack of connection to the world, a job has saved them. The

routine, the connection to other people, the feeling of contributing to the world — these are things that can fundamentally rescue a dangerously unhappy life.

Martin Seligman is a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, and founder of the positive psychology movement that is behind most of this research. He encourages people to spend time and energy learning how to increase their optimism set point.

He explains how in his book "Learned Optimism:" "Positive psychology is not only about maximizing personal happiness but also about embracing civic engagement and spiritual connectedness, hope and charity."

These are the things a job can give you that matter. Wyeth Windham grew up in Montana. His dad was gone and his mom cleaned houses. He was bored in school and hung around with kids who did poorly. He had little future. In his junior year of high school, he started volunteer work with a group that funded youth programs. Six months later, while Windham was involved in his daily work, his friends robbed two restaurants. It was a turning point. Windham saw, maybe unconsciously, a literal example of how work can save you. He was the youngest member of the board at his local Boys and Girls Club. And an Oprah Winfrey fund recognized his achievement and sent him to college on a scholarship.

Today he works at PrintingForLess.com, and recently, he visited Boston for a conference about digital printing. He has a good job, to be sure, but what matters is feeling a part of a larger community, and a spirit of connection to the world. And having the ability to skip out of a conference to walk the Freedom Trail just might be a great lesson in career happiness.

Penelope Trunk is the author of *Brazen Careerist: The New Rules for Success*. Read her blog at blog.penelopetrunk.com