

# Answers to Career Questions

## How to handle an intrusive boss, avoiding burnout and tips on matching your credentials to job openings

BY TAUNEE S. BESSON

*Editor's Note: This month columnist Taunee Besson answers questions about common job hunting and career problems. If you have a question about your job search or career, send it to our monthly advice column, National Business Employment Weekly, Box 300, Princeton, N.J. 08540. All names are kept confidential.*

**Q:** I returned to college in 1981 after working as a staff hospital pharmacist for eight years. Along with my pharmacy degree I now have a bachelor's degree in philosophy with a concentration in ethics, and a master's in management and administrative sciences with a concentration in behavioral management science.

I want a job that involves the management of people in a health-care environment. However, I also want to conduct research and use my writing skills in this job. I have sent resumes to several hospitals, health maintenance organizations and pharmaceutical firms. All of the replies are much the same. "Your credentials and background are impressive, but we do not have anything compatible with your interests."

**What should my career strategy be at this point?**

**A:** Since your credentials and background are impressive, you should consider creating your own job. Given your particular interests, teaching hospitals and medical organizations with holistic approaches to health care, as well as cutting-edge manufacturers, would be your best target employers.

Rather than sending resumes, try to schedule informational interviews with upper-level managers to find out more about their company's philosophies and future plans. Ask them which areas of management or marketing require the most attention now and are viewed as growth areas. As you talk to a variety of people trends and gaps will emerge.

Consider how you might meet their needs through management, research and writing. Then after you have carefully researched the organization and written a proposal outlining the potential benefits of hiring you, present your ideas to the person who has the power to say "yes." While this approach requires time and effort, it is much more likely to uncover what you want than relying on resumes.

Some growth areas you might want to explore in the medical field include training and development, conference planning, marketing, public relations and community affairs. Other emerging fields that are fraught with ethical considerations are bioengin-

*Ms. Besson is president of Career Dimensions, a Dallas-based firm specializing in career development and job search programs for professionals and corporations.*

ering, in vitro fertilization, organ transplantation and artificial life support.

With your background there undoubtedly is a position where you can use your best skills in the medical community. However, it's up to you to find it, even if you have to look outside your area.

**Q:** I am in charge of a large data processing department for a \$500 million division of a Fortune 100 company. I think I handle time management pretty well except for one big problem—my boss. He constantly interrupts me with the most trivial requests. What can I do to keep his visits to a minimum so I can get my work done?

**A:** It's not politically astute to tell your boss that he is wasting your time. Whatever course of action you take needs to be pursued with the utmost tact and diplomacy.

You might try working with your door closed for at least part of the day. A closed door usually indicates an urgent task or conference that should

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not be interrupted. Even your boss probably will respect this unwritten rule. And, as an added benefit, you may find you have fewer interruptions from your staff.

You can tell your boss that you are working on a tight deadline but will be free by a given time. Make it a point to drop in and see him then, preferably with something important in mind that requires his professional opinion. Also, getting together every morning for a 15-minute coffee break might satisfy his need for your attention and keep the trivial conversations to a workable minimum.

If your secretary is absolutely trustworthy, she can rescue you with a long-distance call or similar diversion at your prearranged signal. This approach is risky but worthwhile as a last resort.

One last thought: Take a look at your own priorities. A recent study of managers who have been fired shows their one major common trait is a disinterest in building good working relationships

with their peers and management. Be sure you are not exhibiting that trait yourself when you accuse your boss of dealing in trivialities. He may actually be using a technique valued by good managers called MBWA (management by walking around).

**Q:** I'm a 35-year-old, single, professional woman who has risen through the ranks into mid-level management. All of my peers are men. When I look at their lives, for the most part, I don't like what I see. Most of them are workaholics who have little time or commitment for anything but their professional success. Some of them are exhibiting obvious symptoms of burnout and overwhelming stress, such as alcohol abuse, drug dependency, physical problems and disintegrating relationships.

**I don't want to dig that kind of hole for myself. What can I do to avoid becoming a successful but miserable executive?**

**A:** Workaholism is an insidious disease that gradually envelopes its victims. However, caught early, the success rate for its treatment is excellent. My prescription for you has several elements:

1. Recognize that you are not immune. It could happen to you, too. Judging from your letter, you already are aware of your vulnerability. That's a good sign.
2. Force yourself to set aside time for things you really enjoy. Buy season tickets, join a health club and sign up for exercise classes, enroll in a continuing education course, plan at least one evening a week with friends or schedule one or two hours per day to read. In other words, don't just think about how enjoyable a play might be, block it out on your calendar. Make the same commitment to your "fun" dates that you make to your business appointments. Spontaneous fun has a way of never happening.
3. Set limits on your work commitments. Promise yourself (if you tend to break promises to yourself, promise a friend) that 50 hours per week is the maximum time you will spend at work. Frankly, the hours beyond 50 are not very productive anyway. Do yourself and your company a favor. Come to work fresh each morning, instead of exhausted from yesterday's 12-hour marathon.
4. Find friends who make an effort to balance their lives. With their support and suggestions, you can eliminate or lessen your tendency to fall into unhealthy work patterns.
5. Finally, commit to achieving your definition of success. Make sure it includes more than just your career. Then set goals and action plans to tailor your life to encompass that definition.

Don't live according to the expectations of others. You will only wake up one morning wondering, "Is this all there is?"