

STAY  
HUNGRY  
&  
KICK  
BURNOUT  
IN THE  
BUTT

**Also by Dr. Steven Berglas**

*The Success Syndrome:  
Hitting Bottom When You Reach the Top*

*Self-Handicapping:  
The Paradox That Isn't*

*Your Own Worst Enemy:  
Understanding the Paradox of Self-Defeating Behavior*

*Reclaiming the Fire:  
How Successful People Overcome Burnout*

# STAY HUNGRY & KICK BURNOUT IN THE BUTT

DR. STEVEN BERGLAS

Foreword by Marshall Goldsmith



CENTER  
STREET

Nashville New York

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*In loving memory of my father, Jerome K. Berglas:*

Ancora imparo.



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# Foreword

One of the most popular current dictums in career and life—often attributed to Confucius, though many others have been credited with similar words over the years—is that if you find a job you love, you’ll never work a day in your life. The idea is that when you are fully engaged in the work you do, it won’t seem like work at all. Indeed, it will be so fulfilling that work and life will be forever intertwined in one long and happy continuum. Your job will be your life, and it will lift your spirits and fulfill you in ways that most of us could never imagine possible.

What happens, however, is that when you start a job you like it just fine, but over time—not too long a time for most—you find yourself dreading the commute to work in the morning, or you notice that you cannot wait for 5:00 p.m. to arrive so you can leave your workplace as far behind as possible. Sure, some folks stay late, but you’re not one of those drudges. You wanted uplifts from that job, you’re not getting them, so all you want now is out. This feeling, by the way—feeling so psychologically empty that you can barely

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function—is not limited to the office; you notice that it has encroached upon your personal life as well.

Now what do you do?

In his very insightful book, Steven Berglas turns the conventional wisdom of work and career on its head, taking the reader on a thought-provoking journey through the psychology of what brings us happiness in our work and why it's so difficult for most of us to avoid succumbing to career burn-out. We all know people whose work has made them utterly miserable, relegating them to the never-ending hell of being trapped in "golden handcuffs." They have tried switching jobs before—probably several times—only to end up depressed, dejected, and totally distressed once the honeymoon period ends, and asking themselves, "Why bother?" I have seen it in my own coaching practice: executives and managers—all very smart, all very hardworking—whose careers have crushed their spirits and left them wanting to do anything other than what they were doing before "a job they loved" failed to give them the emotional rewards they expected it would.

Research shows that 80 percent of all workers feel stress on the job, 40 percent report that their job is either very stressful or extremely stressful, and 25 percent consider their jobs to be the number one cause of stress in their lives. All this stress takes an enormous toll on the people who feel it, and on the organizations that employ them. Stress on the job can result in relatively mild physical ailments such as fatigue, headaches, back pain, nausea, and frequent colds, but it can

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also be deadly, leading to high blood pressure and heart attacks. It's estimated that stress costs US companies more than \$300 billion a year.

These numbers make it abundantly clear that while most of us, once or several times, have found a job we thought we could love, our faith in the contention that finding a job we love will lead to achieving happiness is specious at best. My own work tells me this is the case for most people. Many of us have jobs that we enjoy, perhaps even love, yet we are more distressed than we can imagine, and we fear we are descending into a state of burnout.

One cause of this problem, according to Steve, is that even the most rewarding work or career inevitably loses its power to reward us over time. It's not unlike a marriage where the excitement of passionate love begins to wane soon after the honeymoon has ended, in many cases culminating in divorce (the seven-year itch is very real, with the majority of divorces taking place seven years after couples are married). We may have the greatest career, working for the best company, but we will eventually sense that the highs we enjoyed while we grew into that career are no longer there and our happiness has evaporated, only to be replaced by feelings of being burned out.

In his work coaching many of today's top executives, Steve has observed that business leaders often struggle to come to terms with questions of their own shortcomings. Facing them requires vulnerability, which is especially difficult for people who are used to being out front and showing strength. Yet

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vulnerability and humility are often the difference between a good leader and one who knows true greatness. That's why it is so important that leaders are willing to concede their shortcomings and realize there is always more to learn. They must question themselves, and then question themselves again.

In this remarkably powerful work Steve provides readers with a framework for understanding why they are unhappy in their work and careers and exactly what they can do to find happiness. According to Steve, the ultimate path to happiness in work and career is to adopt a mind-set of *entrepreneurism*—where, in his words, “you wake up in the morning with passion and drive for the day ahead.” This, as Steve points out, is the kind of passion and drive that Steve Jobs famously alluded to when he suggested in his 2005 Stanford University commencement address that the graduates should “Stay hungry. Stay foolish.”

Again, research indicates that entrepreneurs are, on average, happier than the rest of us. They are happier because they are able to successfully craft careers that enable them to turn their passion into purpose. They don't just *find* careers they love, they *create* careers they love, and they constantly re-create them—over and over again.

The good news, as Steve explains, is that you don't have to start up your own business or be working in the Silicon Valley to benefit from entrepreneurship. Anyone can have the entrepreneurial spirit deep inside them, even a barista at Starbucks, a financial analyst at Citibank, or a salesperson for the Ford car dealership on the other side of town. The key is to

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find the *why* within you. One of my favorite parts of *Stay Hungry & Kick Burnout in the Butt* is Steve's contention that German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's observation, "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how," is arguably the key to deriving sustained joy from your career pursuits.

If you find that your career is no longer delivering the rewards and psychic satisfaction that it once did, I encourage you to take the lessons in Steve's book to heart. Read them; experiment with them; see how they act to change your life. Start small but keep the big picture in mind. I am convinced that if you give the wisdom within these pages a try in your own life, you'll find that a truly satisfying career will be yours.

And, believe me, you won't experience true, long-lasting happiness until you find happiness in your work and career. All the tools you need to do that are here. Embrace them. Use them. Make them a part of your life. When you do, you will know the kind of happiness that few of us ever have a chance to experience.

—Marshall Goldsmith



# Introduction

Vision without action is a daydream.

Action without vision is a nightmare.<sup>1</sup>

—Japanese proverb

You have a vision.

It's vague because that is the nature of visions, but you see yourself on a Monday morning popping out of bed thirty minutes before your alarm goes off and feeling a sense of anticipation about the day ahead.

And that's where the vision ends.

Visions are tough to hold on to. They're not recollections, things we've done that we see in our mind's eye, but rather a glimpse into the future, most often the type of future we hope to enjoy.

Indulge me for a moment. I'll articulate your vision of the future in terms of *what you do not like about the present*. See if I understand you. What you see lying ahead is an escape from the hell you are in today, a hell born of a career that neither

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engages nor rewards you as you feel it should. You also see yourself talking to someone—who is unclear—but you see yourself getting indignant, throwing back your shoulders, and saying, “This is how things *should* be. I should awaken each day eager to work, not dreading another descent into purgatory. I don’t ask for much; all I want is to be passionate about and fully engaged in a career.”

I hope this sounds reasonable to you; it’s the lament I’ve heard from scores of patients and coaching clients over a period of decades. I believe that you, too, would present this as your vision but for the fact that your work life is nothing like being happy, and you haven’t felt happy for so long you cannot recall if you’ve ever truly felt that way as a result of your work or career.

This book is designed to help you concretize your vision and give you an action plan for realizing it that does not leave you suffering a nightmare scenario. The problem is, it’s highly likely that you have lost sight of your ideal vision since it was formed long ago and has never been actualized. Most everyone starts a career feeling that they will enjoy self-esteem enhancement on a regular basis. Most folks look forward to interacting with coworkers who care about them, praise them, and criticize them in constructive ways when appropriate. Doing well and getting “good feedback” are the main ingredients for building and sustaining self-esteem.

My fear is that you abandoned that dream long ago. Thus, to realize something akin to your ideal vision today, after long fearing it would never come to fruition (and between us,

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I believe you can surprise yourself with how gratifying work can be if it is approached with a thorough understanding of what makes it work and what makes it deleterious to your health), you need an attitude adjustment before embarking upon a new, professional *modus operandi*.

Now, here's where the sledding gets tough. I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but I'm going to give you the toughest part right up front, no punches pulled: "The right job," "a job you love," or "the unequivocal dream job" is never, ever, ever, going to appear during the course of your life.

Nothing close.

This book is predicated on the notion that approaching career satisfaction based on the most popular job-hunting directive around today—to "Choose a job you love"—is as ludicrous as shopping for shoes, buying a pair that is attractive (if they're for stepping out) or comfortable (if they're for plodding through a daily grind), and not knowing the size of the shoes you selected or, more important, what your own shoe size is.

I would repeat what I just said a hundred different ways if I could, but it won't help you. Just accept that a job—*any* job—is so fraught with problems you will never be able to find the right one. Thus, you have to control what you can: you, and your approach to jobs.

I'm not being facile or disingenuous—let me explain. Let's suppose you dreamed of being a teacher but decided to go into the IT field because (a) the market for teachers is shrinking, (b) teaching today, with rare exceptions, is more babysitting

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than what Aristotle did at the Lyceum, and you've admired Aristotle since you began reading, and (c) from your perspective, educators get far less respect and have much less positive influence over society than you believe they should. So now you're writing code in Silicon Valley.

Who prevents you from teaching? You can teach within the context of your job (countless coaches earn fortunes from corporations by doing onboarding, a \$100 term that enables a coach to charge \$500 an hour to show new hires the ropes, something mentors have done for free since Aristotle was around), or you can teach in a limitless number of contexts after work or on weekends. Why would you do that, you ask? Because (a) it's a passion, (b) as you'll be reminded countless times in this book, working for monetary compensation will not yield self-actualization, and (c) if you engage your passions, it's both emotionally and physically energizing. If you think, "Lord, I'm already exhausted after work and this guy suggests doing yet another job," here's a guarantee: You're exhausted at work because it's drudgery. But if you do something after work that is uplifting, it will give you something akin to a runner's high—a shot of endorphins that is uplifting and energizing—leaving you feeling infinitely better than at the end of your workday.

### Where We'll Go—Together

What I just described isn't a vision or a dream. It's the life story of countless people you've read about and I've coached

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or counseled into crafting careers that they were highly engaged in and elated by. But do not take my word for it, or all that follows will have been written for naught. I'll prove it to you—here's how.

To ensure that you actualize your vision of crafting an engaging and gratifying career, in the pages that follow I will escort you through a detailed learning process that will help you see why you feel you are trapped in a living hell, what got you there, and what it will take to get you out of where you are. These are the key elements I will focus on:

- **Preventing you from wrongly blaming yourself for the components of your malaise that are not your fault.**

Self-reproach will kill your capacity to change. I will illustrate what is wrong with work, the rewards of work, and the major problems born of work—95 percent of what makes your job feel like hell and doesn't come close to fulfilling your vision. I'm not saying, "Oh, you're perfect; don't change a thing..." That's a load of crap. What I am saying is that it's advantageous to diagnose your professional situation and your role in it with insight, understanding, and precision. Most of what ails you is a function of what's wrong with *work*, not what's wrong with *you*.

- **Introducing you to, explaining, and having you come to an in-depth understanding of anger.** It's taboo; it's politically incorrect; it's mysterious. It's also instinctive, part of "the human condition," and manageable. Think of it as the German shepherd of emotions: dangerous if misused

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or abused, an invaluable ally if handled properly. I will present an exhaustive justification for changing how you construe anger—from seeing it as a flaw to realizing that it is a fuel—and demonstrating that, despite its horrid reputation there is ample justification for seeing anger as a protective instinctual drive. I will also illustrate the myriad ways in which anger has been used through the ages to achieve laudable, heroic, and life-changing goals, and how you can do that, too.

- **Help you reexamine happiness versus wealth.** I mentioned this with regard to teaching and holding your IT job. I'll tell you much more about why what seems like suggesting you stretch yourself thinner than carpaccio won't do anything of the sort, and (ironically) *will* enable you to thrive.

- **How to craft a career you will feel engaged in and derive gratification from.** The key word here is *craft*. What most people who follow my program do is adapt, modify, retrofit, or realign existing careers so they are tailored to fit their individual needs as described above. I've repeated myself, I know, but it's hard for some people who have been inculcated to believe that choosing a job you love is the answer to their problems to see things differently.

You bought this book seeking relief from a job, or a series of them, that have left your self-esteem bruised or battered. Your spirit is probably drained, and I would imagine that you are less optimistic than pessimistic. Part of the problem stems from the fact that you are not a quitter (“Winners never quit and quitters never win,” right?). But since making a major life

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change is as scary as drifting in the ocean on an air mattress and finding yourself knocked off it by a shark, you're feeling anxious. This is 100 percent normal. So, too, is resisting change owing to a slew of psychological forces.

Don't start changing yet, but do stop entrenching yourself in your job owing to the misguided notion that if you try *just a bit harder* and dig down *just a bit deeper* for that extra ounce of commitment, things will improve. Instead, don't quit your job, but do whatever it takes to maintain the status quo and nothing more. Do not—as most motivated careerists do prior to an emotional collapse—strain, with every fiber of your being, to see if turning up your intensity on the job won't get you past the threshold you've yet to break through so you can land where you will finally be rewarded as you deserve to be. That place doesn't exist save for a select few who've crafted custom-made careers for themselves. The good news is I promise to show you how you can do it, too. For the time being, however, just stop digging.

### One Final Point

"The critical first step in every treatment plan is a thorough diagnosis." Those were the first words I heard on day one of my postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard Medical School more than forty years ago. The image in my mind today of the professor who made that statement is as vivid as a peacock's tail feathers. The professor then added, "In psychiatry *we cannot afford a misdiagnosis*—it would ruin a person's life."

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You are in no danger of a ruined life, but to extricate yourself from the job-induced malaise you are suffering you need to know much more than “this situation stinks.” You need to diagnose what got you into the hellhole you are in and why you have not been able to escape on your own. I will urge you to hold a mirror up to yourself more often than any other “advice book” you can find. This is not done to be critical of you or, heaven forbid, have you be critical of yourself. It is designed to enable you to be *constructive*.

The advice I offer is never one-size-fits-all, and some of it won’t fit you. To know what does and what doesn’t you have to follow the ancient Greek Delphic maxim inscribed in the wall of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi and used by Socrates as a precursor to gaining knowledge: *Know thyself*.

I worked my way through college as a bartender and heard countless toasts. As you get ready to embark on the journey of finding passion and purpose in your career I want you to take a moment to raise a toast to your own courage and commitment to change. Thus, please view the material presented in this book from the perspective of my all-time favorite toast:

*May you have the hindsight to know where you’ve been, the foresight to know where you are going, and the insight to know when you have gone too far.*