

# **NO MORE**

# **IDLING**

Put your career in gear with intentional job crafting.



BY CONNIE WHITTAKER DUNLOP  
AND STEVE GLADIS

Copyright ©2020 Association for Talent Development

**J**en is the senior HR business partner for a Fortune 100 financial services organization's technology division. She leads a team of five employees who partner with IT business leaders to develop and deliver effective people strategies. Jen's leaders, peers, and direct reports see her as a high-performing and high-potential employee.

Jen sees herself in a different way.

From her perspective, she manages a highly repeatable and predictable set of HR processes and systems for a high-turnover employee base. She likens her job to the 1993 comedy *Groundhog Day*, a film that features a TV meteorologist who lives the same day over and over again. The movie serves as a simile for the unending HR cycle of recruitment, selection, onboarding, training, performance evaluation, and separation. Jen often asks herself, "If the rest of the world is moving at full speed, why do I feel like I am idling in place?"

With more than 30 combined years of experience training and coaching leaders, we have discovered that too many employees feel like they are idling in their jobs. For one reason or another, those employees are no longer learning and developing in the workplace in meaningful ways.

According to a 2019 Conference Board survey of more than 2,000 US workers, 60 percent of respondents reported that they are dissatisfied with their job's potential for future growth—the most important contributor to overall job satisfaction.

Yet, there is hope for employees like Jen and those who manage them.

### **Job crafting**

There's a song by Stephen Stills with a great line: "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with." While that is terrible marital advice, it's terrific career advice. People often take a job out of need or circumstance; so, it's their responsibility to try as best they can to mold such jobs

to fit. That's the essence of job crafting, which University of Michigan professors introduced to the world of work.

Jane Dutton, Amy Wrzesniewski, and others discovered that people view work differently. Some view work as a job—a 9–5 thing that isn't motivating but pays the bills. Some view it as a career—they look at opportunities to advance. Finally, some view work as a calling—something they love to do every day. So, if you're in a job, the faster you can reframe that 9–5 mentality, the better for you and your employer. That's where job crafting comes in.

Task-related job crafting generally consists of employees changing the specific tasks associated with their jobs, modifying what they do at work on a regular basis. In task-related job crafting, employees change the set of responsibilities their formal job descriptions prescribe. Workers perform task-related job crafting through stretch assignments or stretch roles.

In a stretch assignment, an individual showcases leadership potential by temporarily taking on additional tasks that were formerly assigned to another employee. Conversely, stretch roles are more permanent than stretch assignments and are intended to ready employees for the next level.

Relationship-related job crafting involves employees changing the relationships associated with their jobs, altering with whom they work on a regular basis. In relationship-related job crafting, employees change the set of human interactions that their formal job descriptions prescribe. One way that workers change relationships is through modifying the frequency or type of interactions that they have with those in their existing network. Another way is through building new networks.

People do job crafting all the time. In fact, no two people do the same job the same way. Under the radar and often even unconsciously, people naturally craft their jobs to fit them better.

### **Intentional change**

George Bernard Shaw once said, "Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." Richard Boyatzis, an eminent researcher and professor, would likely agree. For years, he has been developing intentional change theory, which begins with simply asking people to envision their ideal future state 10 years forward and write down what they see.

Such long-term projection enables individuals to dream of an ideal place they would love to go and sets their mind in what's called the positive emotional attractor—a state of mind that is the opposite of being anxious and fear-

ful. When in the positive emotional attractor, people are hopeful, open, and relaxed, and they even invite change. However, when individuals focus on simply solving day-to-day problems, they can get locked into the negative emotional attractor—a state of mind that is fearful, unsure, closed, and frozen in place. The negative emotional attractor is the opposite of the positive emotional attractor that propels people to their ideal future state—the foundation for intentional change theory.

Let's explore its five stages in pursuit of an ideal state.

**The ideal self.** Who do I really want to be, and what do I want to do with my life? Remember, this is not what others want you to do. Your focus here is on your ideal future best self. Think 10 years down the line. What if your dreams, hopes, and values were realized—what would you be doing in your life and work?

**The real self.** Where do my ideal self and real self overlap? And where do my ideal self and real self differ—what are the gaps?

**The learning agenda.** What's my plan to move from my real self to my ideal self? That is, what are my strengths and weaknesses that I need to address to get to the ideal state? Focusing first on the strengths, you get the energy to work

on your weaknesses—especially when you keep your eyes on the prize: your ideal future best self.

**Experimentation and practice.** Practicing new behaviors repeatedly can get you to the ideal future best self. You need to experiment, fail, and try again until you get it right. Practice to get to mastery, not to simply learn a new skill.

**Resonant, trusting relationships.** You need open, kind, helpful feedback. Others' support helps you get to your ideal self because humans need sounding boards along the journey.

Intentional change theory has been applied to multiple forms of development, including career development. Combining it with job crafting creates what we call intentional job crafting.

### Job crafting process

Intentional job crafting occurs when an employee moves away from the current idle job and toward the future ideal job by developing a job crafting agenda that reimagines job tasks and relationships. The figure below depicts the five-step intentional job crafting process.



**Future ideal job.** The first step of intentional job crafting is to imagine your future ideal job five to 10 years from today. Imagine your work environment, work activities, and the people with whom you are working. Finally, imagine the outcome of your labor. These images may or may not be directly related to the work that you do now.

Let's return to Jen's story. Jen has a clear vision for her ideal job. She envisions herself designing and implementing new HR strategies, such as a new program for diversity and inclusion. To be successful in this ideal job, she needs to deepen existing relationships with fellow senior HR business partners and forge new relationships at the most senior levels of the organization.

**Current idle job.** Examine your current idle job, including the associated set of documented and undocumented responsibilities that you believe are stunting your growth and development. These realities may or may not be directly related to the work that you want to do.

Jen knows that the high-level responsibilities associated with the senior HR business partner role involve managing the HR cycle, leading the five-person HR business partner team, and coaching IT leaders on people-related matters. IT leaders and the strong relationships that she has with them are key ingredients in Jen's past and present success.

**Job crafting agenda.** Establish your agenda for job change. More specifically, to intentionally craft your ideal job, determine which job tasks and job relationships you want to grow, those you want to maintain, and the ones you want to shrink.

Jen decides that she wants to grow the job task of HR strategy and relationships with C-suite executives. She hopes to shrink the task of coaching IT leaders and managing IT leader relationships. She wants to move away from the tactical responsibilities associated with the HR cycle but wants to maintain oversight of this cycle and her five-person team. She also wants to maintain relationships with senior HR business partners. Here is Jen's job crafting agenda:

Job tasks

- Grow: HR strategy
- Maintain: HR cycle management and team leadership
- Shrink: Coaching IT leaders

Job relationships

- Grow: C-suite executives
- Maintain: Senior HR business partners
- Shrink: IT leaders

**New tasks.** Experiment with a task. Experimentation could come in the form of delegating a task that you want to shrink or practicing a task that you want to grow. Through task experimentation, you begin to enact your change agenda and move toward your ideal job.

**IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE  
IDEAL JOB FIVE TO 10 YEARS  
FROM TODAY.**

Jen's act of intentional job crafting has a trickle-down effect on her team. For Jen to be able to take on the new task of HR strategy, she must give up the old task of coaching IT leaders. Thus, she transitions the IT coaching task to two high-performing and high-potential members of her team. Jen prepares and integrates these team members by having them review her coaching notes and observe her coaching sessions as she brings them into the coaching relationships.

**New relationships.** Experiment with relationships. This may include deepening existing relationships or developing new ones with people inside or outside of your organization. Through relationship experimentation, you begin to enact your change agenda and move toward your ideal job.

As Jen integrates two of her team members into the IT leadership organization, she leverages her existing relationship with the chief information officer to get an introduction to the chief diversity officer, a key stakeholder for her first strategic HR priority of creating a more diverse and inclusive culture. Through this five-step intentional job crafting process, Jen is no longer idling and is now putting her career in gear.

## Getting started

You, too, can develop an intentional job crafting agenda that reimagines your job tasks and job relationships to move away from your current idle job and toward your future ideal job. We suggest that you first think long term—five to 10 years out—where you dare to dream to be. Then think of one thing you could change today to make your job a bit better.

**Connie Whittaker Dunlop** teaches and coaches MBA students at the University of Virginia; [dunlop@darden.virginia.edu](mailto:dunlop@darden.virginia.edu).

**Steve Gladis** teaches at George Mason University and researches and writes about leadership; [sgladis@stevegladisleadershippartners.com](mailto:sgladis@stevegladisleadershippartners.com).





# SUBSCRIBE TODAY!



INTERESTED IN SUBSCRIBING TO *TD* MAGAZINE?

## RATES

**\$150**

Individual Domestic (United States)

**\$331**

Institutional Domestic (United States)

**\$249**

Individual International

**\$430**

Institutional International

To subscribe, go to [www.td.org/tdsub](http://www.td.org/tdsub).

**Get even more when you become a member of ATD!**

All ATD memberships include a monthly subscription\* to *TD* magazine, plus access to Watch & Learn webcasts, digital publications, research, discounts on conferences, and much more.

For details about ATD membership, visit [www.td.org/members](http://www.td.org/members).

\*International members outside the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico receive the digital *TD* magazine as part of their membership.