

How soon can you leave a job you hate?

By Rose Jonas, Ph.D.

You just started your new job, and you hate it. Should you leave right away, or stay a couple of years so you don't look like a job hopper?

You should not leave your job right away unless you can get another job you want tomorrow. Nor should you stay two years to make your resume look good. You would find a thousand ways to make the company fire you long before then: Playing computer games on the computer, surfing the 'Net, or making personal phone calls.

Almost everyone hates the new job the first day or so. Before you leap away, wait a few days. Some study long ago said it takes 17 days to get accustomed to being in a new place, whether home or job. You may feel differently in a couple of weeks.

At the same time, be looking around the company to see if you can take on responsibilities or have a different position. Is there something that would fix the situation? If the company spent awhile finding you, it probably would be interested in keeping you.

Okay, you've done both things and you're still unhappy. Now what? Especially if it took you some time to find this job, don't be too eager to jump ship. Instead, do your job during the day and your job hunt at night. It takes longer to find a job when you have one, so realize you're probably there for six months or so. Just be careful, in the meantime, that your dislike doesn't show. The company could invite you to leave (and the end of the 30 to 90 day probation period is often the time you would have such a conversation).

In rare instances, you may have get out, but unless you are fearful for your safety, don't just walk. Give the required notice, and be honest about why you're leaving. You'll probably be there another week or two, and you can manage that.

How do people make such a bad choice to begin with?

People make bad job choices because a spouse may have insisted, in a panic, "Just get a job." Or, they may be living in hard economic times, when taking any job can be a necessity. The biggest reason they choose badly, however, is that - when they went on the interview - they were trying so hard to look good that they didn't pay attention to whether the company looked good to them.

If you have any bad feelings during your interview, examine them with a serious heart. The negatives you sense then - when everyone is on their best behavior - inevitably mean they're

much greater later when people shed their "dating" personalities and put on their pounding gloves.

If you leave the job right away, should you put it on your resume or not?

This is a tricky question. If you list a two-month job on your resume (or several of them), you'll never get the interview, so it makes sense to leave these off your resume. I don't believe in putting in putting months on resumes anyway. Instead of saying you were employed from 1/89 to 7/98, put your employment dates as "1989 to 1998." That makes it easier to leave off that two-month career mistake you made.

Once you get to the company, however, you're often asked to complete an employment application, which asks for month and year of employment. In signing the application, you are stating that you've completed it honestly, and that you understand - if the company hires you - you could be fired if it's later discovered you didn't tell the truth.

I almost always advocate truth-telling, as much because it's a smart strategy as it's the right thing to do. I often waver on fine points like this, however, and I would be likely to tell a client something like this: If you are applying for a job that will depend on a scrupulous background check (F.B.I., C.I.A., etc.), you'd better tell the scrupulous truth. If not, you're probably taking only a slight risk if you leave a two-month job off your resume. This is particularly true if it was seven to ten years ago. Even though companies ask for your complete job history, they tend to focus on your latest ten years.

A note to the high school or college student: Put all your jobs on that resume. At this stage of your life, companies make decisions on you based on how responsible they think you are and how well you manage your time. Holding a job while being a student is a good thing, and a reality of student jobs is they often only last a few months, so you seldom look like a job hopper at this age.