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## Should You Stay or Should You Go?

By HARRY W. SEVERANCE, MD ON JUNE 21, 2022

*Strategies for stabilizing your current job or migrating to a new career if it's time to leave.*

The healthcare sector is now overwhelmed with workers reporting burnout, dissatisfaction, noting depression and feelings of helplessness, loss of control, etc. The 2020 COVID pandemic poured more gasoline on this fire, but the problems were certainly there before the pandemic hit.

In 2018, 46% of surveyed physicians reported that they planned to change their career paths and almost 50% of physicians surveyed reported that they were not recommending a career in healthcare to their own children! [1]

Recent reports show that healthcare workers are four times more likely to be physically or verbally assaulted than those in private industry.[2] The World Health Organization reports that 38% of healthcare workers can expect to experience physical violence at some point in their careers (verbal threats were reported more commonly).[2]

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One 2019 article reported that 75% of workplace assaults occur in healthcare, (yet only 30% of nurses and 26% of emergency department physicians report such experiences.) [2] Emergency Department (ED) physicians, nurses and other ED workers are some of the most salient targets for such abuse/assaults with increasing reports of gunshot wounds and stab wounds now appearing. [3, 4, 5]

These reports reinforce the findings of surveys that note that over half-a-million health care workers have left healthcare between February 2020 and October 2021, as the exodus continues to increase. [6] A 2020 survey noted that the pandemic caused 25% of physicians to seek non-medical sources of income.[7] A 2022 Medscape report noted burnout increases among emergency physicians took the biggest one-year leap jumping from 43% in 2021 to 60% in 2022.[8] And 56% of critical care physicians also reported increasing burnout.[8]

So, how can the individual healthcare worker address these issues of burnout, dissatisfaction, risks of abuse and generalized unhappiness within their workplace conditions?

Here is a 'starter' overview of the initial steps to take in evaluating your position and selecting options for change.

## **Step One:**

Drill down to find the root cause/causes of your unhappiness. Dealing with just the symptoms will never result in a long-term fix. Getting to the root cause may be harder than it sounds — but is critically necessary!

## **Step Two:**

Once you have gained insight into root causes, if the root causes emanate from your job – the second step is to determining whether there are 'fixes' that can be applied within the context of your current job, that will make staying where you are job-wise okay.

## **Option 1 – Fixes:**

1. This still might mean changing job location/employer, etc. Making these changes can still come at great cost/stress, especially if you have a family that is 'embedded' in a certain, geographic location, school district, etc.
2. Are some/all of the problems family/social/economics-related? If so, those will have to be addressed.

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3. Can your situation be improved by “buying down” some workplace time and thus being able to spend more time with family or on other satisfying endeavors with possibly a side gig/hustle?
  - Does your current job allow you to “buy down” time and can your finances afford it?
    - Counterpoint: Most really successful people spend below their means!
    - If you are burned out from overwork in order to pay all the bills maybe this is the root cause that needs to be addressed. Are you one of the working well-to-do? If so, are you only “well-to-do” as long as you show up for the next shift?

## Option 2 – Or Not:

More critically, what if your root cause analysis determines that just changing bosses or locations is not enough – that you need to change your career? This is a huge deal.

## Next Steps – Career Change:

In the case of deciding on career change the next steps are to critically evaluate where you are right now and your destination.

Some of the now-critical questions that need to be answered include:

1. What are your financial needs – now and in the near future? Do you have enough financial reserves to make the changes you want and still support yourself and family?
2. What are you seeking – what are your needs?
  - Financial
  - Job satisfaction, feeling valued/needed in your workplace
  - More ‘joy’ in your life, or
  - Some or all of these?
3. What do you “bring to the table”?
  - Do you already have ‘skill-sets’ for your new career? If not, how will you acquire them? How much time/effort/resources will this take?
  - Do you have connections who can assist and/or guide you in moving into a new career? How will you support yourself-family during this time? Will your family support you – at least emotionally as you make these changes. Do they have your back?
4. Are there already ‘speedbumps’ in your way? Current job, current employer, other naysayers who may feel your new moves may disrupt them or feel you are not adequately supporting your current job/social system, etc.? If your current job/employer/social system is that demanding, this can be reason enough to start migrating to a new job/career/system.

There are many more questions to answer, but these will get you started!

## Next:

What is your timeline for making a switch or change? I have seen some who have, without any other plan, just walked in and said – ‘I quit.’

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Some advisors say this provides the motivation to get to your next goal “sink-or-swim!” I don’t recommend this – especially if you have a family or others that depend on you for support.

Counterpoint – if the naysayers (your employer, your job) prevent you from making any moves forward towards a new career – you may have to quit in order to gain the freedom to move forward.

Others (including me) recommend that, in most situations, you start slow, and bit-by-bit acquire the knowledge, skill set, connections, and/or other tools needed to make a switch. Studies have shown that many of the most successful people, as part of their regular routines, have a five hour/week (one hour per workday) ritual of learning/gaining new information! (*Most healthcare providers already do this anyway for increasing/updating their medical knowledge*)

Many use this strategy to develop ‘side gigs’ that answer their financial/personal/satisfaction needs, and can, over time, evolve into your new career. I recommend this strategy as part of your new career-building ritual.

Be prepared to hit roadblocks along the way and recognize your ideas and target goals may change as you move forward. Someone once said that *“that grass that looks so much greener on the other side of the fence – may not look so green when you have to grow it yourself.”* So, be prepared for the speedbumps and resets along the way.

## **Summary:**

However, moving slow is not an excuse for not moving!

Once you have made the decision that a change is needed, then the best way to begin is to begin! Many of the most successful moguls, including Warren Buffet, continually voice this credo. I first remember hearing this idea from my 10<sup>th</sup> grade English composition teacher, Ms. Nelson, and I have found that it has one of the best pieces of advice that I have ever received.

If your root cause analysis determines that a change is needed – get started. Maybe take baby steps as you create the building blocks needed to make the moves you need. But don’t procrastinate! The best way to begin is to begin – so GET STARTED now!

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