The Short-Timer
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You’ve done due diligence on the job and accepted the offer. But one to two weeks (or more) into it, you realize something:
- You were switchbaited – the job itself or various conditions of the job are not as promised
- The culture is not a good fit
- You hate the role
- You can’t get along with your boss or another key player

One thing is sure – you dread getting up on a Monday morning. In a long career with several or even many jobs, this will most likely happen to you at some point. The common wisdom indicates that you should try to gut it out for at least a year, so it doesn’t look bad on your resume. But is that wisdom or just “what everyone does?” What are your options?

Even in a tight job market, you should not feel stuck. We give too many hours of our lives to work, so it should be more rewarding than that. No one brings their best game to bear if they are miserable. But before you let yourself go numb, consider the following options:

1. If the job isn’t what you thought it would be and you have reasonable rapport with your manager, talk to him or her about the mismatch. There might be a way to reallocate the work so that you can like your job more.
2. In larger companies, there is often an opportunity to move to another group or function. Though the guidelines usually insist on a year in a given position, if you have good skills and an attitude of wanting what is best both for you and your company, waivers might be made.
3. Culture clashes sometimes occur when you don’t understand the “why” behind procedures and processes. Seek out a mentor and see if understanding doesn’t bring peace.
4. Similarly, working it out with people sometimes can be helped by asking for a “crucial conversation.” These are open-ended safe conversations where both parties can find a workable arrangement. In fact, strong friendships often evolve between people who started out not liking each other. As with any relationship, the early days can be filled with misunderstandings and assumptions. Get the straight dope.

If these options don’t work, or too much is wrong with the job, finding something better may be your best bet. So how bad will it look on your resume?
How much is a short stay a deal killer with the next job? If you know leaving is your best option, the following steps will minimize the negative impact.

1. Write down in detail (for yourself) what didn’t work out
2. Note what you should have done to find this information out prior to accepting the offer
3. Next, really analyze and understand what you need in a job to have it work out for you
4. Start looking. Write a cover letter clarifying your strengths as they will apply to the new job and a short explanation as to why you are looking so soon again. Be prepared to be clear and cogent when asked about it in an interview.

Some examples can help. Mary was a real people person, the kind who finds team work exhilarating. She ended up in a job with very limited contact with others and projects that involved only her efforts. In an interview, she told the new employer, “I enjoy the synergy of team work and am inspired by working with others on a shared goal. I can really bring my A game to a team and also help to broker compromises and solutions. In my previous job, I was not afforded a chance to do this. I’m looking because I want to be in a job that takes advantage of my strengths.”

Justin thought he would be designing code from scratch. Instead he is fixing errors, testing and only adding in a line or two here and there. He told the interviewer, “In previous jobs, I wrote programs from scratch and was able to design efficient and understandable working code. Now, I’m stuck with tweaking code and can’t deliver my best work. I’m constrained by old and inefficient designs. I could take any program and make it better, if I was only allowed a freer rein.”

The positive spin makes a difference and by taking on the question of why you are leaving so soon, you take its power away. Companies typically put new hires on probation for 60-90 days. Why shouldn’t you also put your company on probation? You cannot make an ongoing habit of short stints, but a few over a long career won’t hurt you, and each time, you have the opportunity to learn more about effective job hunting.

Don’t let a bad fit turn you from a star performer into a burned-out, resentful wreck. Find out what you are best at and love and go for it. Both you and your employer will benefit.

Stay tuned next month for another edition of “Your Career Coach.”