NEWS LESSON

Why an Easy Job Can Leave You Exhausted



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Can an easy job still leave someone exhausted?
2. Would you rather have too much to do or too little?
3. What makes a quiet afternoon feel different from a boring one?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**perceived**	☐	A	losing interest or involvement
2	**fatigued**	☐	B	a small problem that causes trouble or annoyance
3	**emerging**	☐	C	able to continue without causing harm or exhaustion
4	**agency**	☐	D	very tired
5	**structural**	☐	E	just starting to appear or become known
6	**disengagement**	☐	F	the power to act and make your own choices
7	**sustainable**	☐	G	seen or understood in a particular way
8	**inconvenience**	☐	H	connected with how something is built or organised

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A quiet day at work can still leave you drained. The American Psychological Association says the problem may lie in how jobs are designed.

1 A quiet day at work sounds like a gift, until you have to spend eight hours pretending to be busy. The tasks are familiar, there is little to learn and leaving is not an option. That kind of boredom can be draining. It is different from enjoying a spare hour after a demanding morning.

2 The term rust-out describes a persistent sense of disengagement associated with insufficient challenge, repetitive duties or work perceived as meaningless. It differs from burnout, although both can leave employees fatigued and detached. In a September 2026 feature, the American Psychological Association highlighted emerging evidence that workplace boredom is not merely an inconvenience but can affect psychological and physical wellbeing.

3 One important distinction is between having too little to do and having too little that feels worthwhile. An employee may spend the entire day processing forms or responding to routine messages while having virtually no opportunity to exercise judgement. The workload is real, but the sense of personal contribution is weak. Under-stimulation should not be confused with the healthy pauses that allow people to recover. The crucial distinction is whether employees have agency, variety and some prospect of meaningful progress.

4 Such circumstances create an uncomfortable trap. Employees may feel guilty about complaining when they receive a regular salary, especially if others are experiencing unemployment or intense stress. At the same time, inactivity can erode motivation and self-confidence. The apparent security of an unfulfilling job may make the prospect of leaving seem financially reckless.

5 Organisational psychologists point towards job design as part of the answer. Autonomy, task variety, feedback and opportunities for development can make a difference. Yet promoting superficial 'fun' at work is unlikely to resolve structural problems, and employees should not bear sole responsibility for putting them right. A manager might start by asking which responsibilities staff would actually welcome, rather than assuming that another team-building afternoon will somehow bring their motivation back.

6 One reason rust-out receives less attention than burnout is that its symptoms can appear morally uncomfortable. An employee who feels exhausted by repetitive work may hesitate to complain in the presence of colleagues facing intense pressure. Yet the relevant distinction is between restorative freedom and enforced disengagement. Being paid to remain available while deprived of meaningful influence over one's tasks is not equivalent to receiving leisure time.

7 The person may be required to maintain an appearance of productivity, which adds a layer of frustration to the original boredom. This helps explain why simply piling on more tasks is not necessarily an effective intervention. If the additional work is equally monotonous, it may increase activity without restoring engagement. Job quality involves autonomy and purpose, not just the volume of assignments completed.

8 For years, workplace wellbeing has been framed as a question of protecting people from excessive demands. Rust-out complicates that picture. A genuinely sustainable job may require an appropriate level of challenge as well as manageable pressure. The opposite of exhaustion is not necessarily having nothing to do. Sometimes it is having something worth doing.

Sources: American Psychological Association. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer implies that extra tasks may not help if they are as dull as the existing ones. T F NG
2. The writer says rust-out receives less attention than burnout because its symptoms are physically obvious. T F NG
3. The American Psychological Association recommends hiring more staff to reduce boredom. T F NG
4. Part of the reason an employee in this position may stay silent is the pressure that other colleagues are under. T F NG
5. The writer argues that a manager's best first step is to organise a team-building afternoon. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

deprived	detached	equivalent	erode	intervention	persistent	reckless	virtually

1. Years of unchecked inflation can _____ the value of a pension.
2. Investing his entire savings in one start-up struck his friends as _____ .
3. Her _____ cough lasted for months and finally sent her to the doctor.
4. Children _____ of sleep often struggle to learn.
5. Early _____ by teachers can stop a minor problem from becoming serious.
6. The new report was _____ identical to last year's, with only two words changed.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Her _____ to accept the new role surprised the whole department. (RELUCTANT)
2. The report points to a lack of _____ among senior staff. (ACCOUNTABLE)
3. Many graduates find routine data entry deeply _____ . (FULFIL)
4. Critics accused the board of _____ in dealing with complaints. (EFFICIENT)
5. Her manager's _____ reaction to the complaint surprised everyone. (DISMISS)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Pick the verb that normally partners the noun. These pairs are fixed, so a near synonym often sounds wrong.

foster	harness	pose	reap	tackle	undermine	voice

1. Poorly designed jobs can _____ morale across an entire department.
2. Several staff were reluctant to _____ their view that the work was pointless.
3. A good manager will _____ the problem at its root rather than treat the symptoms.
4. Autonomy can _____ greater engagement among staff.
5. Overly strict supervision can _____ a risk to creativity.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What could a manager change before adding more tasks?
2. When does boredom become a reason to leave a job?
3. Could a more interesting life outside work make an ordinary job easier to enjoy?

9 Role-play: a talk about a boring job

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the manager

Your employee looks tired and bored. Find out what is wrong. The team is short of staff, so you cannot give them a new role this month. Offer something smaller, or say no politely.

Student B · the employee

Your job is too easy and you feel tired every day. Ask your manager for more interesting work and more freedom to choose your tasks. Explain why it matters to you.

Useful phrases

I'd like to talk about my tasks.

I'm finding the work a bit too easy.

That's not something I expected to hear.

We're short of staff right now, so I can't promise anything.

Could I take on a small project?

Let's try it for a month and see.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the manager agree to change anything, and was it a fair deal?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 D · 3 E · 4 F · 5 H · 6 A · 7 C · 8 B

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 erode · 2 reckless · 3 persistent · 4 deprived · 5 intervention · 6 virtually

6 Word forms

1 reluctance · 2 accountability · 3 unfulfilling · 4 inefficiency · 5 dismissive

7 Language focus

1 undermine · 2 voice · 3 tackle · 4 foster · 5 pose

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