NEWS LESSON

# A Quiet Job Can Still Be a Draining One



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 | **drained** | ☐ | A | time when you are not busy with work |
| 2 | **chronic** | ☐ | B | a special advantage that not everyone has |
| 3 | **autonomy** | ☐ | C | no longer interested or involved |
| 4 | **privilege** | ☐ | D | very tired, with no energy left |
| 5 | **wellbeing** | ☐ | E | your health and happiness |
| 6 | **qualifications** | ☐ | F | the freedom to make your own decisions |
| 7 | **downtime** | ☐ | G | lasting for a long time |
| 8 | **disengaged** | ☐ | H | exams or courses that show you can do a job |

## 3 Read

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

**A worker has an almost empty calendar but still has to account for every hour. Psychologists call the exhaustion that can follow rust-out or boreout.**

1 We normally associate exhaustion with being overworked. Yet somebody can return home drained after a day in which almost nothing demanding happened. This apparent contradiction has attracted attention from workplace psychologists, who describe a problem known as rust-out or boreout.

2 Picture a worker who spends the morning keeping up appearances and the afternoon waiting for a task. Their calendar is almost empty, but they still have to account for every hour.

3 Unlike burnout, which is associated with excessive workplace stress, rust-out involves chronic boredom, insufficient challenge and a lack of purpose. In September 2026, the American Psychological Association examined research suggesting that under-stimulating work can have serious consequences for wellbeing and motivation. Simply reducing an employee's workload does not necessarily make their working life healthier.

4 The problem is not always an empty schedule. Someone may be constantly busy completing repetitive tasks that offer no opportunity for creativity or personal development. Another employee may have useful qualifications but little control over their responsibilities. The common factor is feeling disconnected from the work itself.

5 This can become a difficult situation. Workers may lose concentration, procrastinate and feel ashamed of their lack of enthusiasm. They might also be reluctant to complain because colleagues are overwhelmed, or because having a secure job feels like something they should appreciate. Financial commitments can make leaving impossible. An honest conversation can be difficult to start. Saying 'I need a more demanding role' sounds positive; saying 'I'm bored' may sound like an insult to an already stretched manager.

6 Employers have a role to play. They can offer training, vary responsibilities, invite staff to contribute ideas and give people more autonomy. Workers may be able to ask for greater challenges, although individual determination cannot make up for badly designed jobs or weak employment prospects.

7 What makes rust-out particularly awkward is that it can look like a privilege from the outside. Employees dealing with demanding shifts may struggle to sympathise with a colleague who says their work is too easy. That misunderstanding can discourage people from speaking up about boredom until they have become seriously disengaged. There is also a difference between welcome downtime and enforced inactivity.

8 A quiet hour after a busy morning can be refreshing. Being expected to sit at a desk all day while pretending to be occupied is different: it removes the freedom that might make spare time enjoyable. People can feel trapped between the fear of appearing ungrateful and the frustration of wasting abilities they worked hard to develop. Recognising this distinction may help managers identify problems that standard workload measures do not reveal.

9 The debate about modern work often focuses on reducing pressure. Rust-out suggests that balance involves more than doing fewer hours. People also need tasks that stretch their abilities, opportunities to grow and a convincing reason to care about what they do.

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. Financial commitments can make leaving a job impossible. T F NG
2. Reducing an employee's workload always makes work healthier. T F NG
3. Rust-out affects more workers than burnout. T F NG
4. Rust-out differs from burnout in its cause. T F NG
5. The text says that 'I'm bored' sounds more positive to a manager than 'I need a more demanding role'. T F NG

## 5 Vocabulary

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

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **appreciate** | **commitments** | **discourage** | **enforced** | **insufficient** | **overwhelmed** |
| **procrastinate** | **sympathise** | | | | |

1. Many students _____ before exams, checking their phones instead of revising.
2. Because of his financial _____, he could not afford to leave his job.
3. The team was _____ with work after three colleagues left.
4. The shop closed because it had _____ funds to pay its staff.
5. Too many rules can _____ staff from sharing new ideas.
6. I really _____ your help with the move.

## 6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time she spoke to her manager, she _____ bored for months. (FEEL)
2. Workplace boredom _____ in many offices because it can look like a privilege. (IGNORE)
3. If managers listened more, employees _____ less trapped. (FEEL)
4. In September 2026, the American Psychological Association _____ research on under-stimulating work. (EXAMINE)
5. He avoids _____ to his manager about his boredom. (SPEAK)

## 7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many collocations join a verb to a noun, or an adjective to a noun. Decide which word sounds natural before you check the rest of the box.

| hold | interest | pressure | set | steady | take | tough |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

1. Someone with a _____ salary can still feel unhappy at work.
2. After years of repeating the same tasks, she lost all _____ in the job.
3. A manager should _____ a good example to the team.
4. Employees often feel under _____ at the end of the financial year.
5. He decided to _____ a risk and ask for a different role.

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

**4 True, false or not given**

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

**5 Vocabulary**

1 procrastinate · 2 commitments · 3 overwhelmed · 4 insufficient · 5 discourage · 6 appreciate

**6 Verb forms**

1 had felt or had been feeling · 2 is ignored · 3 would feel · 4 examined · 5 speaking

**7 Language focus**

1 steady · 2 interest · 3 set · 4 pressure · 5 take

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