Dear Friends and Clients,

As I waited in a Post Office line, I watched the clerk. She looked to be so deep into the doldrums that she could barely hear her customers. It seemed that when she finally heard a customer request, she’d move in slow motion, lethargically searching through stacks of paper with her eyes half closed and her mouth half open.

As the minutes ticked on, I became annoyed. Then I thought, Oh, I’d hate to have her job. So I was feeling more empathetic when it was finally my turn. By then, nobody was behind me in line, so I engaged her in conversation.

I said I needed to mail my passport for renewal, and led her into a discussion about the safest way to send it. I made a big deal about my worries, and soon she was lending me a pen and making gentle fun of my concerns. And we were laughing together.

The clerk may have been overwhelmed by the monotony of her job. But she seemed to wake up when she connected with, and focused on the needs of, another person. Shifting your attention to somebody else’s problems is a classic way to beat back boredom. And that’s what I’ll discuss in this issue.

Warm wishes, Bev

Boredom is no fun & it’s bad for business. But you can fight back!

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Some people are less than productive because they suffer from chronic stress. Perhaps, throughout each workday, they are bombarded with difficult requests and demands from bosses, customers and colleagues.

But other low achievers may have a different kind of problem. They experience too few challenges. Nothing exciting happens in the course of a day, and they feel less and less creative. Even if they’re busy, these folks aren’t getting enough stimulation to stay interested. They are bored.
On the job, unproductive boredom seems to be the opposite of what psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has called "flow." You’re in flow when your work is so absorbing you lose track of time. It’s like you are playing a game that is so much fun you forget about everything else. Csikszentmihalyi, who has been studying the satisfying flow state for decades, describes it as a time when “action follows upon action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention by the actor.”

You are more likely to find yourself in flow, and not at all bored, when:

- Your **skills** match the level of the challenges you face. Tasks that are too easy are boring, while those that are too difficult may lead to anxiety.
- Something about the work is **intrinsically rewarding**.
- You have **clear goals**. And,
- You have some sense of **control** over the situation and the outcome.

**Are you finding your job to be tedious? If so, don’t wait to be rescued. Do something about it.** Maybe it’s time to shake things up, but in a good way, with anti-boredom strategies like these:

- **Create challenges.** If your work doesn’t feel stimulating, find ways to enrich it with new levels of complexity and challenge. Try creating games as you pursue tedious tasks. One study reported that long-distance truck drivers who played mental games, like counting passing objects, reported little boredom and were also safer drivers. Sometimes you can pep things up by seeing how fast you can race through tiresome activities.

- **Engage with others.** Particularly for extroverts, isolation can feel boring. Look for opportunities to broaden your circle and interact with others. And, wherever you are, take the time to really focus on the people around you. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that a retail clerk might make her work more interesting, and at the same time improve service, by striking up genuine conversations with customers.

- **Vary your routines.** Make an effort to shift your habitual patterns. Flow is associated with exploration, and even simple changes can make you feel more alive. Try new ways of doing your projects, look for new tools or systems, and rearrange your schedule. If you don’t know what to do, just try something different. And maybe it’s time to plan an adventure vacation? Or at least a special lunch?

- **Learn something.** Research suggests that being in flow helps us forge new neural connections. And it works both ways. If you regularly learn new things, you are less likely to be bored. So take a class or pick up a skill. Even if you’re studying something not directly related to your job, it can help you become more alert and innovative.
• **Hang out with do-ers.** Boredom can be contagious, and if you spend time with passive, disengaged people you may start to feel the same way. Look for opportunities to be with active people. You’ll feel more stimulated if your life includes folks who pursue worthwhile, interesting activities.

• **Exercise.** Get up and move around at the office, walk as often as you can, and build regular exercise into your life. People who are physically active are less likely to bog down in ennui.

• **Journal.** You are more likely to feel bored if you lack self-awareness and tend to be out of touch with your own emotional state. Writing about your thoughts, observations and activities can help you to develop emotional intelligence. The more you notice each day, the more interesting your life may become.

Everybody has dull tasks and uneventful days. But if you frequently feel jaded, maybe it’s time to kick yourself into a new gear?