

THE ART OF QUITTING

Turns out that quitters do **WIN**—and the payoffs are major. Here's how to just walk away... from a job, a relationship, a workout or anything that's no longer doing it for you.

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By Ellen Seidman



Want to take off? Focusing on the good stuff you see ahead will give you **THE GUTS** to make a life-changing move.

VOLUNTEERING IN A PEDIATRIC PLAYROOM AT A CANCER HOSPITAL IS A PRETTY GOOD THING TO DO, RIGHT? SO I FELT DOWNRIGHT EVIL FOR WANTING TO QUIT. I WAS IN MY 20s; I HAD GOTTEN A JOB WITH LONG HOURS, WHICH MEANT I SOMETIMES ENDED UP STUCK AT WORK AND HAD TO BAIL ON MY 6 P.M. VOLUNTEER SHIFT. BEING UNRELIABLE WASN'T FAIR TO THOSE KIDS, BUT I STILL COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO RESIGN.

A lot of us delay quitting anything—jobs, activities, relationships, fitness routines and even bland books—because we think we should have the grit to see it through, women warriors that we are. Extreme endurance is a virtue, if not an essential for succeeding in today's competitive work and Match.com market. Besides, most of us have been brought up to believe that winners never quit. We can do it! Even if it makes us miserable!

Quitting can be scary, but it's vital for overall satisfaction, not to mention joy. "Life is too short to waste time and energy on things you find unrewarding or unproductive," says James E. Maddux, PhD, senior scholar at the Center for the Advancement of Well-Being at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va. "Replace your source of dissatisfaction with something more fulfilling and you'll find more happiness."

FIRST, SOME GIVE-IT-UP INSPIRATION

So what makes us stay the course when we're disgruntled or uninspired? It's human nature to adapt to circumstances, as

frustrating, stressful or just plain annoying as they may be. "It's like having a bad knee—you learn to live with it, paying attention only when it really hurts," notes Maddux. Of course, you don't have to tough out that tempestuous neighborhood association or tepid hot yoga class. Time is not infinite, and by ending something punitive, you make room for something pleasant.

There are even health payoffs to knowing when to throw in the towel. Research has shown that people who are better at bailing on unattainable goals have lower levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) and fewer headaches than those who have a harder time. In one pivotal study, University of British Columbia psychologists tracked teenage girls for a year. The ones who more easily stopped pursuing a hard-to-reach goal had declining levels of a protein that indicates bodily inflammation, linked to heart disease.

WALK THIS WAY... AWAY

These are the simple steps for giving the heave-ho to what's not working and getting to a

better, happier place. It's mainly a mind shift—you focus as much on what you hope to gain as what you plan to lose from your life.

X Quit calling yourself a quitter

The word *quitter* is associated with failure, notes Maddux, and feeling like a loser is dispiriting, so reframe your perspective. Try this financial analogy: "Think, 'I am going to divest from this and reinvest my energy and efforts in something that will have a better payoff,'" he suggests. "Once you stop seeing yourself as a quitter, it's easier to disengage."

X Get real about your misery

Sometimes it's hard to admit just how fed up or overwhelmed you are, especially if you're the Little Engine That Could type. "Stoicism is first cousins with masochism," says Alan Bernstein, a psychotherapist in private practice in New York City and co-author of *Quitting*. Whether you're assessing how you feel about your job, your marathon training or a biography you're *sloowly* reading, it helps to consider if you have "flow"—when you get so absorbed in what you're doing that you lose a sense of time. It's one of the purest forms of contentment around, and if it's lacking, you're missing out.

X Ask yourself one little thing

A question to ponder: Who, exactly, are you doing this for? That's the advice from Molly Mogren Katt, 33, of Minneapolis, who left her position as a communications director for a celebrity chef—which her friends considered the coolest job—to become a writer, one she finds to be the coolest. Now she regularly interviews accomplished quitters on her blog, *Hey, Eleanor!* It's named after Eleanor Roosevelt, who famously said, "Do one thing every day that scares you."

"People I speak with often say they were doing things they didn't love because they felt people or society expected them to," says Katt. "One of my favorite stories is about a makeup artist who put in so much effort to look younger. Then she quit coloring her hair at 49—and landed a job as a model for Dolce & Gabbana. Once she embraced who she was, she got a great gig."

X See the future

The more you focus on what you're going to do with that extra free time, the easier quitting is. "Writing down what you want next is motivating, empowering and invigorating," says Bernstein. So if you want out of a relationship, say, mull over the essential qualities you're looking for in a future partner. True, it's not like you can order a boyfriend off Amazon (even via drone), but you'll feel more inspired to make it happen. As for times when there is no "next," like when you just feel like ditching your role as PTA treasurer because you're overbooked, picture the benefits of life without it: Hello, more free time with your kids (not to mention your Hulu queue).

X Rehearse your exit

Thinking ahead to what you'll tell a boss or your weekend tennis partner when you end things can quell paralyzing anxiety. "Couch it in an empathic way: 'Although it may not be convenient for you...,'" advises Bernstein. "The point is to connect to the other person's needs as well as yours."

No matter how much you dread telling someone that you're bailing, the reality may surprise you. There's a chance that if you're feeling it, others are, too, as I discovered the day I finally told the coordinator I had to stop volunteering. She said she knew I was headed in that direction. And then she offered to let me volunteer on holidays, which I did for years to come. Proof that I'm a quitter? Hardly—I'd call that a win-win. ■

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PERMISSION TO QUIT, GRANTED!

It's totally fine to...

- x ...watch only the good seasons of *Orange Is the New Black*/*House of Cards*/*Luther*.
- x ...unfriend people on Facebook who regularly post "meh" updates. Who cares if she's power-washing her deck?
- x ...accept that you'll never do a triathlon. Not now. Not next year. Not ever.
- x ...give up making smoothies

so healthy you have to hold your nose to drink them.

- x ...forget about getting the kids to make their beds. The neat police will not descend on your home.
- x ...quit forcing yourself to read the entire Sunday paper.
- x ...leave your hairdresser. She will survive.
- x ...abandon the hope of putting all your family photos into albums—iCloud for the win!

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