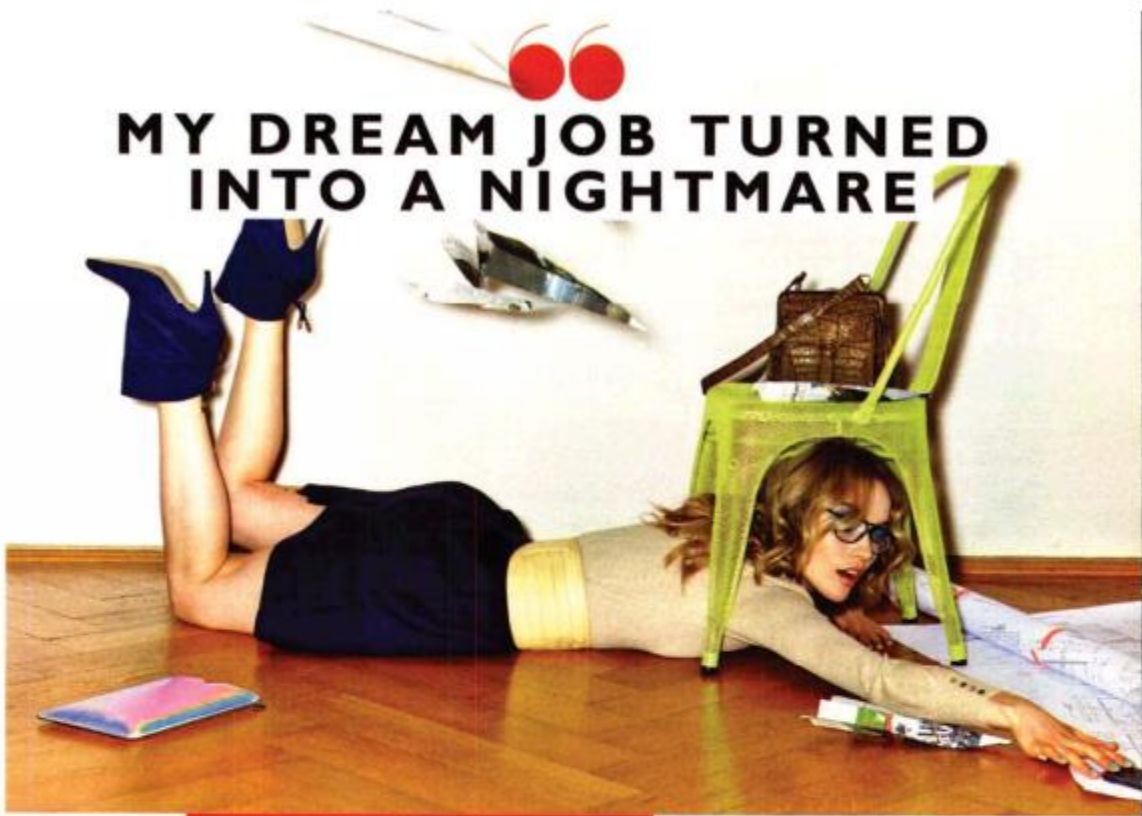




(Circulation: 143,818)

14th March 2016

(PR value: £21,890)



What happens when the career you've chased for years ends up being the worst move you could have made?

Nicole Mowbray reports

LIGHT THE FIREWORKS, turn up the cheesy music. After years of studying and clawing your way up the rungs of the career ladder, you've finally done it – landed your perfect role. Now, you're off to pastures new and most definitely better, and you couldn't be happier.

But what happens if that ideal career move doesn't live up to your sky-high expectations? If your dream job turns out to be a nightmare?

It's an all-too familiar reality for 34-year-old Louise Field*, from Kingston upon Thames in Surrey, who gave up her comfortable but 'untaxing' job at a small finance company in July 2014 to move to a big corporation in the City.

'I'd been at my previous company for four years,' she says. 'It got to the point where I felt I could do the job standing on my head. There were fewer than 100 of us in the firm, so I knew most people. We'd have lunch together, see each other in the work gym, go to social events as a gang – text each other at the weekends.

It was nice, I was comfortable but I just didn't feel challenged.' »

When a recruitment agency head-hunted Louise for a bigger role at a global company, she was flattered. 'The salary for this new job was much higher, there were great perks and it was a much more senior position,' she says. 'I hadn't really been looking to move but, the further I went down the interview process, the more desperately I wanted the role. My parents were really proud of me being offered such a well-paid job in a reputable company, and their very vocal approval piled pressure on my shoulders. Each time I spoke to them they'd ask me if I'd heard from the company – this went on for weeks. When I was finally offered the role, it felt like a no-brainer. I snapped it up.'

While handing in her notice was 'emotional', Louise couldn't wait to start her new job, but in the two weeks between finishing at her old position and beginning her new one, the realities of such a big step-up became evident.

'I started receiving emails from my new company while I was on holiday, before my contract even started,' Louise says. 'Sometimes, they'd arrive at 11pm or midnight, "filling me in on events" that were happening. It worried me, but I convinced myself that there would obviously be a lot of catching up to do at the beginning.'

Things didn't get any better when Louise started. 'On my first day, a colleague actually said, "Welcome to hell." They weren't far off. I was immediately plunged into working 60-hour weeks, sometimes more. People were so stressed that many were quite unfriendly – there was no camaraderie or team spirit. No one even had the time to show me how to do anything or who sat where. I had a run-in with a senior colleague in that first week and got

a dressing down in the middle of an open-plan office. After that I felt my card had been marked. I was frequently the object of someone's rage. It was a high-stress macho environment and I just didn't fit in.'

Louise persevered with her role but, gradually, the perks and benefits she'd signed on for stopped seeming so attractive. 'I was spending all the extra salary I was earning on taxis home from the office, or into work in the morning as I was so tired. I didn't have time to do anything in the week – clean my flat

or do my washing – so my weekends became full of chores. When Sunday night came around I had the worst dread and would often become quite tearful. I kept up a pretence to my family and friends as I didn't want to lose face, or for them to worry about me, but inside I was hating every weekday.'

The breaking point came four months in, when Louise met some friends at a pub after work on a Friday night and broke down in tears. 'Whereas I'd usually be able to put on a front and wow them with tales from this huge glossy company, I just told them I hated it and dissolved into tears,' she says. 'I couldn't keep it to myself any more. It was such a relief.'

That weekend, Louise formulated a plan with the help of her best friend. She would stick with the job for another two months and then hand in her notice. 'It would take me into a new calendar year, which I thought would slightly disguise the small amount of time I'd spent there on my CV,' she says.

Joan Kingsley is a consultant clinical and organisational psychotherapist who has recently written a book, *The Fear-Free Organization*. She believes positions that seem like a dream very often aren't.

'Going from a social environment where you're liked and accepted into somewhere very competitive can be

tough,' she says. 'Schoolyard tactics of not being invited to lunch or being missed off meeting invites are almost a strange rite

of passage. If it's your colleagues who are being nasty, don't worry, they'll almost always come round. Keep your head down and, if your boss likes you, you'll be OK.

'But, ultimately, you have to know who you are. Some people love pressured environments, others don't.'

She points out that part of the problem lies in our expectations of jobs, which usually focus on what we hope to achieve, rather than the day-to-day reality of the work involved. 'Say you want to be a lawyer, because you want to make a difference in the world while earning a good salary. When you get there, however, you discover that it's a grind, it's hard work, you're delivering to a bottom line. It's a job.'

Nicola Banbury* understands this only too well. 'I'd been working for some years in the same media company and rising through the ranks,' she says. 'I was hungry, looking for the next thing: a promotion, more responsibility, more money. As I look back now, I can see each step up brought me more unhappiness. I wanted this "success" so badly, but it was taking me further away from the person I identified with. I had to turn into someone else.'

'Eventually, my partner sat me down and explained to me the changes he'd seen in me over recent months and years. I was cross at first, then realised he was right. I was changing into someone I didn't like to try and fit into the niche that had been carved out for me.'

So what should you do if you take your ideal job only to discover it's everything you never wanted? Joan Kingsley says there should be zero tolerance of bullying or abusive working environments, but if it's more a case that the role or company simply doesn't suit you, it's wise to try

to stick with it for six months to a year.

'Focus on learning and knowledge,' she says. 'Be curious with everything, draw on the people you work with. Learn from your colleagues, educate yourself, absorb things, and try to network. It's normal to feel unsettled, to not know how to turn on your computer, to feel confused by the systems at the start, but if after several months you're still not comfortable then it's probably not the right role for you.' ■

Have you worked hard to land a new job, only to hate the reality of it? Let us know at feedback@graziemagazine.co.uk



**I WANTED
THIS
'SUCCESS' SO
BADLY, BUT I
WAS TURNING
INTO
SOMEONE I
DIDN'T LIKE
TO FIT IN**