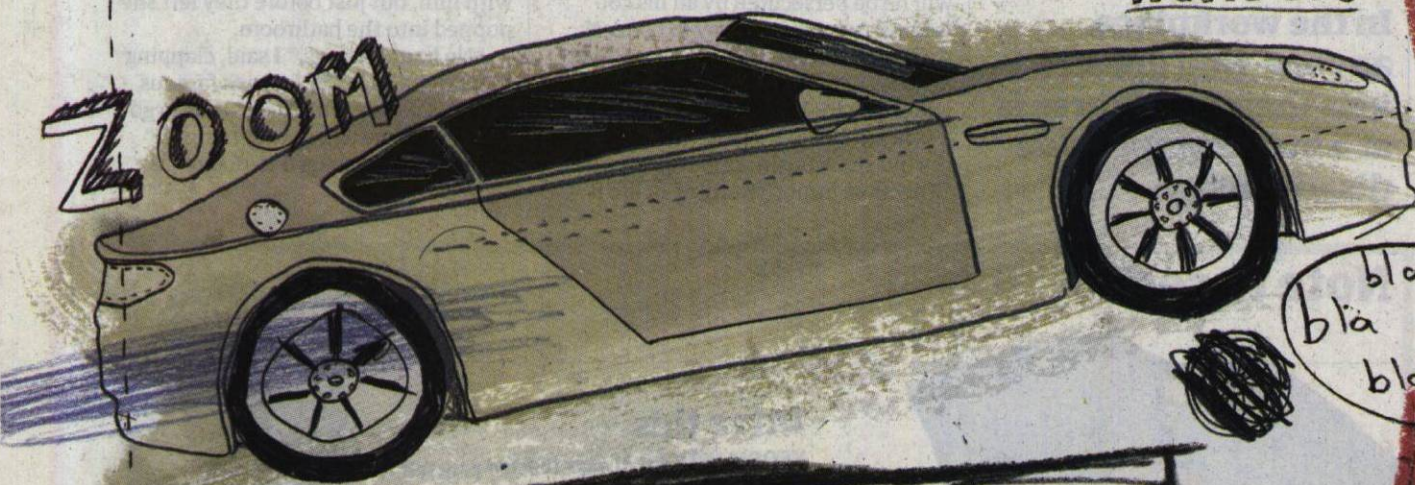


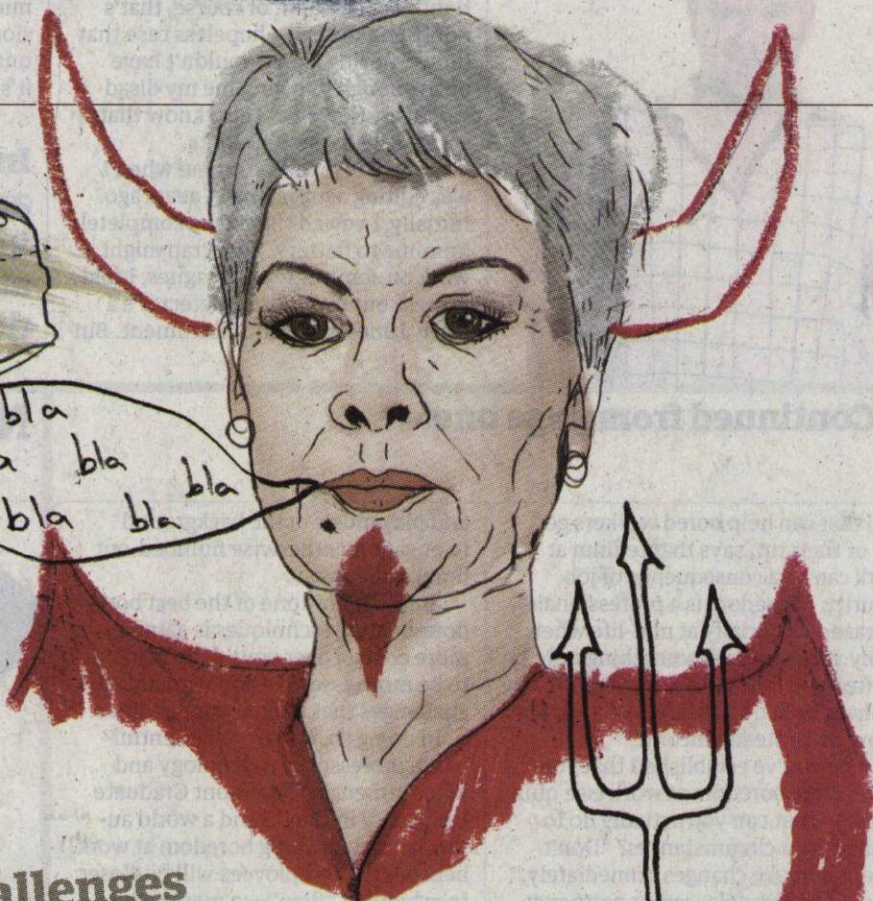
bored at work

Must get Miss Money Penny's mobile number.

ZOOM



bla bla bla
bla bla bla



Dulling down

For many of today's professionals, the challenges of a once-fulfilling career have been replaced by tedium. Liz Hollis investigates life in the bored room

There is an epidemic of boredom that is affecting workers far beyond the traditionally mechanised, repetitive industries. Tedium has spread beyond the factory conveyor belts and supermarket checkouts into jobs that were once thought to be enviable positions.

Mounting paperwork, faceless technology, meetings, bureaucracy and information overload are numbing workers in even fast-paced and exciting jobs, says a study by the University of Central Lancashire. This is leaving them with little better to do than doodle in meetings, think about their next holiday or while away the hours surfing the internet aimlessly.

Indeed, there is a flurry of websites that have achieved cult status among utterly bored workers, such as Every 10 Seconds This Camera Takes a Picture of a Parking Lot in Toronto, which is reassuringly duller than most jobs.

But psychologists believe this boredom epidemic is no joke. "At least a third of British workers claim to be bored at work for most of the day and it's affecting jobs you would never expect to be dull, such as teaching, marketing, the law and management," says Sandi Mann, the study's author. "Boredom is the second most commonly suppressed emotion at work."

Boredom in the workplace – which, according to Mann, could be more damaging to workers than overwork – is akin to the feelings experienced by a teenager who insists they're bored despite having lots of things to do. It is just that none of their tasks holds the slightest attraction.

"Boredom is a protest when the job doesn't seem part of who you feel you are," says Rob Briner, professor of organisational psychology at Birkbeck, University of London. "You feel

negative about the organisation and lack job satisfaction. It is a risk when you are not being told what your job means."

Joanna Hopkins, 39, is typical of the highly qualified creative worker whose apparently "exciting" position as marketing manager for a large communications firm turned out to be mind-numbingly dull.

"The job was hard-won, so what a disappointment when I was utterly bored from day one – a new experience for me in my career, so I knew it was the job and not me," she says. "I worked long, tedious days filled with meetings – then meetings about meetings. I often wasn't sure why I

'My job was many people's idea of heaven, but I spent hours clock-watching'

was there or what I was supposed to contribute."

Hopkins, who also faced a mountain of "pointless" paperwork and hundreds of emails she had been copied in on for no apparent reason, subsequently left the job and now works as an event manager for the RAC – a position that is "much more interesting and enjoyable", she says.

Such a surge in paperwork and meetings is producing ripe conditions for a boom in boredom. Figures from the British Chamber of Commerce show the UK government has introduced more than 900 new workplace regulations in the past decade.

Corporate missives from on high undermine control and make work duller, says Mann. "Even many graduate or skilled jobs now have

detailed guidelines or even a script setting out what you must say or do.

"We also interact more through faceless technology, and workplaces are becoming increasingly automated. Many jobs that in the past were skilled are now achieved with the press of a few buttons. A highly trained pilot now spends most of the flight sitting back while the autopilot takes over."

Add to this the rise of click-on-click-off culture, falling attention spans and the assumed right to self-actualisation and achievement, and it is little wonder this workplace malaise is on the rise.

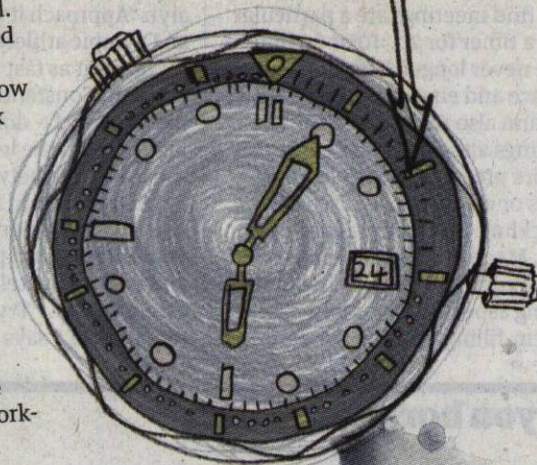
But idealistic graduates, full of energy and expectations, are not the only ones at risk. So too are the under-stretched and mid-career workers who know how to do their jobs with their eyes closed.

"My job might have been many people's idea of heaven, but in reality I spent hours of my working life clock watching," says a former local newspaper football reporter, Rick Waghorn, 41. "The internet undermined my job. Norwich City FC set up its own website and all the other rolling news media were churning out stories around the clock. Meanwhile, I was in thrall to the printing press, with a once-a-day 9.30am deadline.

"I'd been told to write to fit, which after 14 years into the job, took ... oh, 20 minutes. After that it was back to clock-watching and phoning a few contacts to get something in the bag for the next morning."

Now, Waghorn runs his own football website (www.rickwaghorn.co.uk) and has not looked back. "I am never bored – it's my own business," he says.

Barbara Moses, a Canadian management consultant who has set up an online career-planning



Now where's that sleeping gas?



x 50

Silenced to the max

ILLUSTRATION: WWW.SCRIBBLEJAY.CO.UK

Opinion

Toby Young on failure

Sucking up is a delicate art - we all need to do it but woe betide us if we ever get caught



« Continued from page one

tool that can help bored workers get out of their rut, says that tedium at work can be a consequence of job security. "Boredom is a professionals' disease - especially at mid-life when many years to learn something new, be excited and take risks," she says. "They are held back by the safety of a job they know and a steady income."

Once you've established that you suffer from boredom at work (see quiz below), what can you actually do to change your circumstances? "Don't accept it, make changes immediately," says Binna Kandola, senior partner at the occupational psychology practice Pearn Kandola. He suggests speaking to your line manager first: explain that you love your job, but do not feel sufficiently challenged. "Phrase it positively," he continues. "If that doesn't work, speak to somebody higher up - until you get to the person at the top. If that doesn't work, then leave."

If you find meetings are a particular drag, set a timer for 20, 40 or 60 minutes, but never longer. This helps to up the pace and engage participants more. Mann also recommends ditching meetings altogether and opting for brief, more pro-active video-conference calls or email/phone discussions. As for tackling that mountain of paperwork, Mann suggests interspersing boring admin tasks with the more interesting aspects of your job. "Break down form-filling into smaller chunks

As someone who's squandered a series of life-changing opportunities, I'm often asked whether I'd have done things differently if I was given a second chance. The answer is yes, obviously. I would have done almost everything different. In particular, I would have done more brown-nosing.

Now, I know that's a self-aggrandising thing to say. The implication is that the only reason I'm not more successful is because I didn't suck up to the right people - and, of course, that's not true. I'm such a hopeless case that brown-nosing alone wouldn't have been enough to overcome my disadvantages. However, I also know that sucking up to people works.

It certainly worked on me when I was editing a magazine 15 years ago. Initially, I vowed that I'd be completely immune to flattery. That crap might work on some of my colleagues, I told myself, but my bullshit detector's a finely tuned scientific instrument. But

there was one little suck-up who was smarter than the rest. He used to call me "boss" and whenever he said it his voice had a slightly ironic inflection. He was flattering me - sort of - while letting me know that he didn't think I was the type of person who was easily taken in by brown-nosers. He was, in effect, paying me a compliment.

If he'd called me "boss" in an un-ironic attempt to butter me up, it would never have worked - at least, I hope it wouldn't have. But because he put inverted commas around it - because it was always accompanied by a nudge and wink - he gave me permission to enjoy it. It was as if we had an unspoken understanding - hey, I know it's bullshit, but let's just play out this

In the workplace, anyone who doesn't kiss their boss's arse is at a huge competitive disadvantage

stupid little game for the hell of it.

Needless to say, I ended up promoting him over the heads of several better-qualified candidates.

In the workplace, anyone who doesn't kiss their boss's arse is at a huge competitive disadvantage. It is the modern equivalent of failing to learn how to use an International Business Machine on the grounds that these new-fangled gadgets will never catch on. The old business mantra used to be: Change or die. The new one is: Kiss butt or be prepared to get your butt kicked.

In order to be really effective, brown-nosing can't be too obvious. Even though everyone does it, woe betide the poor fool who gets a reputation as the office suck-up. Not only will he be persecuted by all his colleagues (what better way to conceal their own arse-kissing activities?) but his boss won't feel particularly special when he's told what a genius he is by a crawler. When it comes to flattery, the old show business dictum applies: "The most important thing in life is

sincerity. When you can fake that, you've got it made."

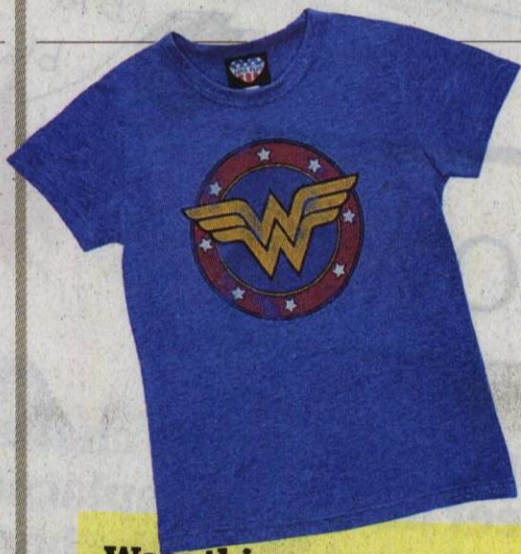
Of course, in certain industries, no amount of arse-kissing is ever going to be considered over the top. In Hollywood, for instance, every conversation begins with a ritual exchange of mutual appreciation: "I just loved you in that fried chicken commercial." No one believes a word of it, of course, but it's become such an established part of everyday interaction that if you neglect to do it the person you're talking to has their nose put out of joint.

Let me end on a note of caution: it doesn't always work. About 20 years ago, I found myself in a bar competing for the attentions of a beautiful young woman with Adam Ant. Not altogether surprisingly, she elected to go home with him, but just before they left she popped into the bathroom.

"No hard feelings," I said, clapping him on the back. "If I was as famous as you, I'd expect a girl like that to go home with me as a matter of right."

I only just managed to dodge his right hook.

Note to self



Wear this

When you've survived a hideous week at the office only to be called in on a Saturday to deal with a crisis not of your own making, scrumple this Wonder Woman tee over your head and channel Lynda Carter. Star-spangled pants and gold-bedecked bustier not compulsory. Buy one for £24.99 from truffleshuffle.co.uk

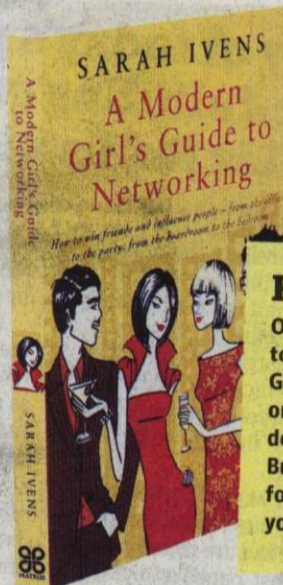
Eat this

4pm gloom getting to you? When the day seems never-ending, a delicious treat makes the home strait bearable. Eat Natural's new pear, pecan and ginger bar is a tasty afternoon bite, and you can comfort yourself with the knowledge that it's all, well, natural. And dipped in dark chocolate. But still healthy. Honest.



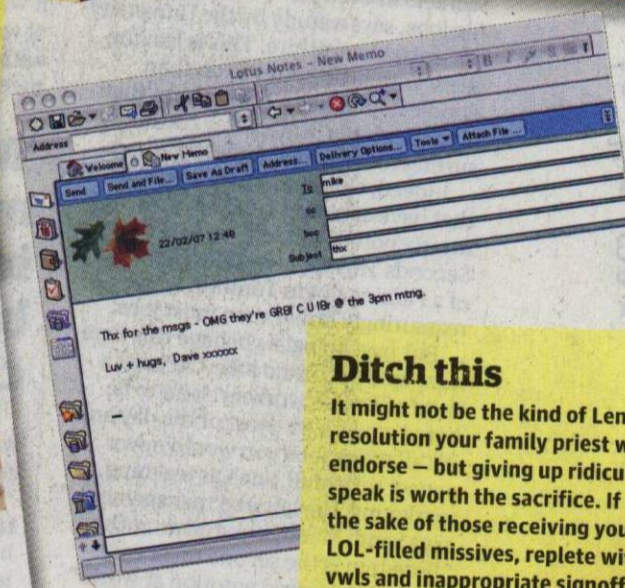
Drive this

VROOM VROOM! Always fancied yourself as a motorsport champ? Indulge your childhood dreams with a Recaro chair. Obviously, it looks pretty horrid, but not only do you get the driving heritage, it's an ergonomic dream, with adjustable/contoured everything promising the, erm, sit of your life. A snip at £1,395.



Read this

Or maybe not. It really depends on your tolerance level. Even the title, *A Modern Girl's Guide to Networking*, puts my teeth on edge (girl? I haven't been a girl for a decade and I doubt the author has, either). But if you're hankering after "10 top tips for fashion fabulousness" at work, then you'll love this. Published March 8.



Ditch this

It might not be the kind of Lenten resolution your family priest would endorse - but giving up ridiculous email speak is worth the sacrifice. If only for the sake of those receiving your daily LOL-filled missives, replete with mssng vwls and inappropriate signoffs. Please stop now. Everyone will be a lot happier ;P

Are you bored at work?

1 Are there lots of tasks you could be doing but none that appeal?

2 Are you unclear what your job means to the company and why it is valuable?

3 Do you have lots of open-ended meetings where you find your mind wandering?

4 Are you drowning in paperwork?

5 Do you exercise little freedom over how you do your job, for example do you have to perform to a script or detailed guidelines?

6 Do you have little freedom about when you carry out tasks, for example when to take a break?

7 Do you frequently find it hard to concentrate?

8 Do you feel unchallenged for most of your working day?

If you answered yes to three or fewer questions, it's likely you experience boredom at work occasionally. If you answered yes to three or more, then you are very bored indeed. Take immediate action: speak to your boss, change how you do your job or leave.

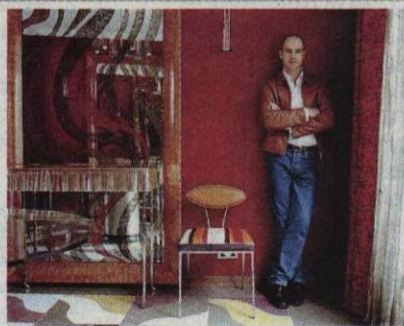
My mentors

Interior designer Mark Humphrey was inspired to set up his practice by a strong tutor and a great boss

I was raised in a family full of mad, eccentric English inventiveness. So when I realised that I lacked the 110% motivation to become a tennis pro, going back to design felt natural. Unfortunately, the course I did at Middlesex University was very much: this is the workshop, this is the computer room - turn up if you want.

It wasn't until my final year that I gelled with a tutor, Ellen Cull.

The previous 12 months I'd spent at a design practice in Stuttgart. There I worked and worked. I think it was because I worked twice as hard as anyone else when I came back that Ellen, who was very good friends with furniture designer Robin Day, decided to invest time in me. Every teacher likes a pupil



who works hard, even if they're not very good. That was the start of it and then we both realised we liked the same things.

Ellen always said, "Take pride in drawings and sketches. If you can't sketch it, no one will understand what you are trying to create." He was also

very much into detail and how things fit together. I still see him. That is important to me and probably to Ellen, to let him know I'm doing all right and that I'm going forward. I invite him to launches and my shows to say, "Hey, you were part of this."

I've always wanted to open my own business; I wanted to be my own person. That is probably why I freelanced in Germany after graduating. But I released I couldn't open my own design practice because of the language barrier. So I came back to London. I sent out my CV to lots of established architects and designers but only one responded - the socialite decorator Nicky Haslam. He offered me freelance work and soon made me managing director and partner of NH Designs. I set

the practice up with Nicky, from him working alone to having 10 employees by the time I left, four years later.

Nicky helped me learn about high-end interior residential design in a number of ways, particularly how to communicate with clients and the use of antiques. And I helped Nicky by introducing him to more modernist attitudes. When I first met Nicky he was a gent wearing suits, by the time I left he had his now-trademark stubble and spiky hair. Our relationship was good for us. Ultimately he gave me the opportunity to design for myself. And by doing something you learn how it is done. I thank Nicky for that.

Mark Humphrey was talking to Matt Keating