

30 Things to Do to Keep From Getting Bored Out of Your Skull at Work

The war between being and nothingness is the underlying illness of the twentieth century. Boredom slays more of existence than war. - **Norman Mailer**

I'm not one to get bored, ever ... but a number of readers have written in with the question: What do I do if I'm bored out of my skull at work?



Photo courtesy of [zebrastripes](#)

It gave me pause, to think about why I can't recall ever getting that bored at work. And I realized: I always keep myself busy, doing something, whether it's productive or not.

Sometimes, I'm creating a new project, or improving myself somehow ... but sometimes I just find interesting stuff to read online or find a cool solitaire game to play. (Well, I haven't played any games in awhile, but Freecell used to be my poison of choice a few years ago.)

So the short answer: **just find things to entertain yourself**. Keep your mind busy. Challenge yourself. Talk to somebody. Break out of your mold.

The longer answer has to do with **analyzing why you're bored in the first place**. Is your job that boring? Are you really doing what you want to be doing? Is there a way to start pursuing something better? Or are you already in a great job, but something or someone is holding you back? And what can you do to improve the situation?

I'm not going to pursue the longer answer in this post, but give you some ideas for the shorter answer. It's not an exhaustive list of ideas. Just some things I've done to keep my mind busy — pick and choose those that might work for you.

1. **Create a new challenge**. I think this is by far the best thing on the list, but you may differ. Many times we're bored because we don't have a challenge — things are too easy or routine. So instead of waiting for someone to create a challenge for you, do it yourself. How can you challenge yourself? Set a new goal at work. Challenge yourself to produce more than ever. Explore new projects. Set personal goals and pursue them.

Whatever excites you.

2. **Pursue your next job.** If your job is so boring you don't know what to do with yourself, you may need to move on. But instead of quitting right away, start lining up your next gig first. Look around for openings, call people, update your resume and submit it to a few places, pick up a few applications, send out some email feelers. Find something that will never get you bored, something you'll be passionate about.
3. **List your life goals.** What is it you want to accomplish in life? Not just with work, but personally? If you've listed them before, it's always good to update them. Then choose one of those goals to achieve this year. Now think about what you can do today to move closer to that goal, even if it's just a small thing. Get the ball rolling. Do this every day — move yourself closer to that goal.
4. **Read Zen Habits.** Or whatever your favorite distraction is. If it's something that will improve your life, even better. Just limit how long you read at one time, so you're not reading through the Zen Habits archives in one sitting.
5. **Declutter your workspace.** If I've got nothing better to do, I'll clear off my desk (if there's anything there), or start looking around critically at everything in view and asking myself, "Does that really need to be there? How can I simplify this?" Weird, I know, but I have an oddly uncluttered workspace. Right now my desk is a table, my iMac, an nothing else. No files, no papers, no office supplies, nothing. Everything is done on my computer, and I love it that way. Nothing on my walls. You may not need anything as spartan as that, but decluttering can be a lot of fun.
6. **Pursue a hobby.** My hobby (until it became a profession) was blogging ... I would do it at work in my spare time, or before or after work. Not everyone can pursue their hobby at work — the model airplane glue might bother your coworkers, for example — but sometimes you can just read about it while at work. I was upfront about my blogging and freelancing at work with my boss, btw, but many people get away with doing it on the sly. I won't make a recommendation, but just don't get fired.
7. **Make your work a game.** You can make a game out of anything. See how many widgets you can crank in 10 minutes. Pretend that your coworkers are evil villains. Imagine that you are a CIA agent in disguise, and no one knows. Or a fairy princess. Whatever floats your boat. :)
8. **Educate yourself.** On Guam, this is called "edumacation" — it's not a real word, but we like to play with English. Whatever you call it, you can improve your knowledge online in any area — whether that be work-related or not. Be your own college instructor. Wikipedia is a great place to start, but if you're going to have a specialized knowledge in anything, branch out from there.
9. **Improve your skills.** Along the same lines: choose a skill that needs sharpening, and challenge yourself to get better at it. Whether that's computer programming, writing, working with Adobe InDesign, or whatever. Perfect your skills — you can use it to further your career, get a new job, or become self-employed. Or just have the satisfaction of knowing you're the best you can be at that skill.
10. **Play Sudoku.** Perhaps not the most intellectual game of all time, or the most exciting ... but I still find it a lot of fun. I only played it a little while and didn't get addicted like other people I know, but I have to admit it's a fun way to pass the time.
11. **Choose a soothing desktop picture.** I like to do this when I'm procrastinating. I will go online, to flickr or some desktop wallpaper website and browse around until I find a very simple, soothing picture. I do this maybe every month or so. In fact, I'm going to go do that right now!
12. **Do some pushups and crunches.** If you're bored, you might as well start getting in shape. You can do pushups and crunches right there on the floor next to your desk (or go outside if you're worried about your coworkers seeing you). Or walk up some steps, or do squats and lunges without weights, or dips in your chair, or butt squeezes (that means squeeze your own butt, not your coworkers').
13. **Take a day or two off.** Sometimes you just need to refresh yourself, recharge your batteries before starting again. Don't do any work while you're out. Veg out, or read, or sleep, or exercise, or whatever. Get your mind off work. Think about your priorities. Get out in nature. Reconnect with your life.
14. **Take a walk.** Often this is all I need, especially if I've been sitting all day and my blood is pooling up in my butt and legs. I need to get that blood circulating! Go outside, walk around, look at people, look at nature, think about your day and your life and the people in it.
15. **Drink some water.** Dehydration can make us tired and sluggish. Water can refresh us. Keep that water coming all day long — you may need to pee more though.
16. **Call a loved one.** What better time to call someone to catch up, to tell them you love them, to just say hi ...

than when you've got nothing better to do. It's a nice way to stay connected.

17. **Read.** I like to carry a novel everywhere I go. Then I whip it out anytime I have spare time, waiting at the doctor's office, in line at the post office, driving in the Indy 500 ... you know. If not a novel, carry around a "to read" folder with stuff you want or need to read but don't have time for right now ... then whip it out at your desk when you're bored. You could have a "to read" folder on your computer too.
18. **Start writing your novel.** Many of us have a novel that's tossing itself around in our heads and hearts, waiting to come out. Well, start getting it out, mister. Just start by writing some notes, thinking about characters and plot and what the hell this book is about anyway. It's not going to come out by itself.
19. **Take a nap.** If you don't have a good place to do this, you can curl up under your desk with a sweater, or go to your car and sleep. I've learned how to fall asleep at my chair, but thank goodness I'm working at home and can go to the couch in a napping emergency.
20. **Create a new project or role.** If things are stagnating at work, start something new. Create and innovate. What can you do that has a lasting impact for your company and for yourself, for your career? If you're stuck in a dead-end role, create a new role for yourself. It doesn't matter if it's not in the job description. Find something that's not being done by someone else, something that needs to be done or that hasn't been thought of yet, but that would really benefit the company — and take it upon yourself to do it. You might need to talk to your boss, but sometimes you can just start doing something and inform the higher-ups later. If it's good for the company, and if they're smart, they'll be happy.
21. **Write a love letter.** If you have a significant other, write a letter telling them why you love them. They'll love it. Email is fine, but pen and paper are even better.
22. **Do one small thing to make yourself wealthier.** That might be creating a savings account if you don't have one yet, or setting up an automatic transfer between checking and savings every payday, or researching a money market fund or index fund, or simply reading *Get Rich Slowly* or *The Simple Dollar* for personal finance basics.
23. **Write a blog post.** This is something I love to do when things get slow. I'll just call up a text file and start writing. I love lists, of course (you guys should know that by now), so often I'll just start making a list, and writing down my thoughts. If things are really slow, I'll do the whole blog post. I can always post it later if necessary. Make sure you love what you're writing about.
24. **Do an errand.** This can either be in the office ("Where's that ink cartridge I've been needing all week?") or outside the office ("I really should buy toilet paper today!"). It gets you moving, it gets you away from the scene of your boredom, and it accomplishes something useful.
25. **Update your personal finances.** I used to track my finances through Microsoft Money, but I've since switched to using a Google spreadsheet, so that it's online and accessible from anywhere. I considered other online solutions, but personally, I like to keep things as simple as possible. However you do it, it's a good idea to update your financial tracking system once a week or so, so that you know where you stand and you don't overspend. Got some spare time? Update.
26. **Meditate at your desk.** Some people would say this is just a fancy term for taking a nap. But for me the key is not to fall asleep, but to close my eyes and focus on my breathing. Nothing new-agey about this — it brings your focus back to the present and calms you. Sometimes it'll calm you so much you'll fall asleep. I say, two birds, one stone.
27. **Organize your files.** OK, this might seem boring to many people, but I like to organize things. I get a perverse satisfaction from purging useless stuff and having everything be smaller, neater, and in order. And it doesn't take long.
28. **Clear out your inbox.** I get joy out of an empty inbox, whether that's my email inbox or physical one. Crank through it until it's empty — you don't have to do everything in the inbox, but just make a note of it on your to-do list if you plan to do it later (or delete, file, forward, or do it now). Got a thousand or two emails in your inbox? Put them in a temporary folder and do them later, starting with a fresh inbox. Chances are, you won't need to do them at all. Now just keep your inbox empty from here on out.
29. **Crank up the tunes.** Some funky or upbeat tunes might just do the trick. They can make any job much more fun. Either play it on your speakers if your coworkers don't mind, or plug in the earbuds. Currently on my playlist: Radiohead, Clap Your Hands Say Yeah, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Jack Johnson, Snow Patrol ... I could go on and on.
30. **Get wild!** Sometimes we just need to let loose. Start singing at the top of your lungs, or dance around the office. Sure, people might stare or laugh, but a little fun in the office isn't a bad thing. Or get out of the office and do something fun or crazy. One afternoon of wildity isn't going to hurt you (well, stay away from things

that are illegal or life-threatening, if possible).

The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity. - **Dorothy Parker**

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