

# How Smart People Lose Their MOJO... and How To Get it Back!



## Part Two: Seven Career Traps SMARTER People Avoid

In part one of the article, I introduced the concept of MOJO, and Marshall Goldsmith's definition of NOJO. MOJO refers to the moment we do something purposeful and powerful- that leads to career success and significance. In sports, business and politics, the term has evolved to describe a sense of positive direction. MOJO can represent personal advancement: moving forward, making progress, achieving goals, clearing hurdles, passing the competition — and doing so with increasing ease. What you're doing matters! Many athletes call this being "in the zone." In my book [Smart2Smarter](#), I refer to this state as being in "flow." [Marshall Goldsmith](#) calls this state "MOJO".

"NOJO" is the opposite of MOJO. NOJO people appear negative, bored, frustrated, dispirited and confused. They ask "Why is happening to me"! Individuals who choose not to look inward to identify their role in an event, lose their MOJO and get stuck — and may stay stuck. Some people seem to have MOJO one day and NOJO the next. This volatility is often caused by a series of ongoing, hard-to-spot mistakes that can lead to a crisis. If we can recognize what triggers us to lose our MOJO early, we can prevent NOJO events from spiraling out of control.

### The Seven Common Career Traps Smarter People Avoid.....tell your smart friends!

As you examine these potential career traps, try to pinpoint the ones to which you're predisposed, and the next steps to take to regain your MOJO.

#### 1. Over-committing

If you're good at what you do and like your job, it's easy to take on new challenges. You're bursting with MOJO. People want you in their meetings and on their teams. The old adage, "If you want something done, just ask a busy person," may apply to you. And if you're ambitious, the last thing you want to admit to your boss or coworkers is that you can't handle EVERYTHING.

If you believe you have superpowers, you will box yourself into a corner by taking on too many tasks. At that point, the quality of work and positive emotions and connections will begin to fail, and you'll lose your MOJO (and possibly much more). Ironically, the habit of over-committing has an unintended consequence: It makes us appear under-committed and not really serious about anything— a perception rarely appreciated by customers, colleagues or bosses.

#### 2. Waiting for the Facts to Change

When we experience a setback, it's not uncommon for us to wait for the facts to change into something that fits our "iceberg story or plan. Such wishful thinking is the opposite of over-committing, as it leads to under-acting. Instead of doing something, you freeze and do nothing.

When the facts are hard to swallow, ask yourself: "What path can I take if the situation doesn't get any better?" Then, get ready to pursue that path. Then reflect, did I choose the thrive or survive path?

### 3. Looking for Logic in All the Wrong Places

We devote many professional hours to finding logic in situations and ignoring the intelligence of emotions. First rule of human behavior: human beings are first emotional, then logical. Our minds crave order, fairness and justice, and we're trained to value logic. But much of life is simply unreasonable, unfair or unjust, which sets us up for disappointment and can kill MOJO.

We sometimes hope logic will prevail against all odds and that it will prove we're in the right. If we stubbornly stick to our stance, then eventually everyone will see how right we are. In the meantime, we often seriously damage important work life relationships. Remember, the best decisions combine the heart (emotions) and the head (logic).

### 4. Bashing the Boss

Talent-management [firm DDI](#) found that the average American spends 15 hours a month criticizing or complaining about his or her boss. While "bashing the boss" may relieve tension and get a few laughs, denigrating your boss is not a smarter career move, as other people will wonder what you'll say about *them* when they're not around.

Bashing doesn't build a better boss. It only serves to infect the work climate, tarnish your reputation and lower emotional flow. The emotional negativity you spread will affect others' MOJO, too- and you may find yourself alone or out of a job.

### 5. Refusing to Change Because of "Sunk Cost"

Each of us has sunk costs in our lives. Most people did not become successful because of luck; rather, we had to invest a big piece of ourselves – and soul - into our work. At some point, this emotional, physical and cognitive investment may have stopped paying off, without our conscious awareness.

Once incurred, a sunk cost (what we invest emotionally, physically, socially and cognitively) as part of engaging in life, often cannot be recovered. This "sunk cost" can also be the basis for "impulse" decisions that go against our best interest. When you throw more of yourself at a problem and hope for different results, we can compound the negative impact — all because we cannot admit it is time to "move on".

### 6. Confusing the Mode You're in

We have two modes of behavior: professional and relaxed. Our professional selves are image-conscious. We pay attention to how we look, dress, speak and behave. We can't afford to be sloppy.

In relaxed mode, some of us go to opposite extremes. We're less guarded about everything, including our speech, language and use of humor.

So, what happens when we're in relaxed mode, but still in the company of work colleagues and friends? Are we sarcastic and cynical in ways inappropriate to the office setting?

The more you close the gap between who you are as a professional and who you are when relaxed, the greater the trust and confidence you'll generate in the essence of you.

## 7. Maintaining Pointless Arguments

Arguing happens anytime you put a group of smart, successful people into a room and give them a problem to solve. It also happens simply because people have egos or stance to defend, and it's a primal instinct to compete.

Arguing can put our career MOJO at risk by needlessly creating enemies instead of allies. Many arguments are fought to improve our status or career success, rather than to solve a problem for the greater good- career significance.

These four "losing" arguments have the same end result: no change in outcome. Look for ways to make your point, and then move on, with your MOJO intact.

- a. **Let me keep talking:** Everyone has opinions and enjoys expressing them. In fact, we feel it's our right to do so. Sometimes, however, we just can't stop; we have to have the last word. It can be very hard for smart people to "just let it go."
- b. **I had it rougher than you:** When we revel in how poor we were and how much we had to overcome to achieve our current station in life, all we're doing is trying to elicit other people's admiration.
- c. **Why did you do that?** We'll never really know why people do what they do – their true motivations. We can speculate, yet only have an educated guess. Why waste hours speculating why people do things? Stop tolerating toxic behavior and start appreciating the diversity of humanity.
- d. **It's not fair:** You disagree with a decision that has been made. You believe you haven't been given the real explanation. Arguing won't change the outcome. Deal with it. Save your precious MOJO.

## MOJO Recuperation

What can you do when you recognize these behaviors in yourself? It's easy to say, "OK, guess I'll stop doing that."

Someone once asked Goldsmith, "Does anyone ever really change?" After surveying 86,000 former clients and, later on, more than 250,000 respondents from his leadership development seminars, his conclusion is unequivocal:

"Very few people achieve positive, lasting change without ongoing follow-up. Unless they know at the end of the day (or week or month) that someone is going to measure if they're doing what they promised to do, most people fall prey to inertia."

The key words in Goldsmith's statement are "**measure**" and "**follow-up**." Very few people can succeed alone with self-help efforts, therefore many seek assistance from a mentor or executive coach.

Always remember that your competition continually responds to a changing business environment by [working smarter](#). This means MOJO is not an option; it's a career differentiator.

To learn how to develop the seven skills every smart person needs and every employer wants, go to [www.smart2smarter.com](http://www.smart2smarter.com)

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