

Boreout: When Work Becomes Draining Because It Is Not Challenging Enough

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1 Burnout and Boreout: Two Seemingly Opposite States with Similar Consequences

As burnout became more widely discussed, many people began to realize that the exhaustion they experienced after long periods of intense work had a name. Around the same time, another condition, almost opposite in nature yet similarly damaging, also gained attention: boreout.

Boreout refers to a state of work-related boredom and disengagement. It often occurs when the workload is too light, tasks are too infrequent, or the work itself is repetitive over a long period of time. As a result, employees may gradually lose motivation, interest, and a sense of purpose. The term was first introduced by business consultants Peter Werder and Philippe Rothlin in their book *Diagnose Boreout*, and was later examined more deeply by sociologist Elizabeth Prammer.

2 Boreout Is Not Just Ordinary Boredom

Feeling tired, unmotivated, or bored at work from time to time is completely normal. However, boredom can exist at different levels of intensity. If the feeling of boredom continues after working hours and begins to affect your personal life, relationships, and sense of self-worth, you may be experiencing boreout.

People with boreout often become irritable, frustrated, and increasingly prone to feeling worthless. They may live with a quiet but persistent sense of stress, while at the same time lacking the energy to begin or complete meaningful tasks. Staying for too long in a comfort zone that initially feels safe can eventually slow down personal growth.

Common signs of boreout include:

- Intentionally browsing the internet, wasting time, or doing personal activities during working hours.
- Feeling physically sluggish, emotionally low, and mentally unfocused.

- Experiencing low self-esteem, uselessness, or a loss of personal value.
- Struggling with social functioning and feeling that one's work is meaningless or disconnected from the surrounding environment.

3 Boreout Is Not Harmless

According to therapist Wolfgang Merkle, the symptoms and potential risks of boreout share many similarities with burnout. In a survey conducted in the United States, 43% of respondents reported experiencing negative emotions for more than half of their working week. Millennials were found to be twice as likely to experience this condition compared with other age groups.

Like burnout, boreout can leave people feeling empty and gradually drain their inspiration and motivation. When this happens, the ability to respond flexibly and solve problems, both at work and in everyday life, may become slower and more difficult. A person's attitude toward most things can shift toward indifference, passivity, and mere coping.

Once enthusiasm and self-discipline begin to fade, it may also be a sign that the person is moving closer to a more serious mental health crisis, including depression.

4 Quitting or Giving Up Responsibility Is Not Always the Solution

After six years of studying and working in advertising, person A decided to take a gap year to rest. However, because she did not make any specific plans and believed that this break should be devoted entirely to personal comfort, the pause gradually turned into a period of uncertainty and aimlessness.

A shared: "I lived with my family, so when I quit my job, I did not feel immediate pressure to earn a living. Before that, my life at least had a work schedule. But after I stopped working, apart from eating, sleeping, and entertaining myself, I had almost no motivation to do anything. I thought this break would help me completely refresh my life. But it did not. Instead, I once again fell into a crisis."

Many young people feel trapped when they realize that their worldview, abilities, and sense of value seem to be limited by their job. They fear being stuck in that cycle for the rest of their lives. However, without reflecting on the root of the problem, it is difficult to arrive at a rational and sustainable solution.

Therefore, quitting a job, abandoning everything, or cutting off surrounding connections may not be a complete answer. Sometimes, what matters more is understanding why you feel bored, what is missing from your life, and which parts of your working style or lifestyle need to change.

5 How Can Boreout Be Overcome?

In Vietnam, the psychological effects of long-term boredom are often dismissed or misunderstood. Some people assume that boredom is merely the result of having too much free time, believing that busy people simply do not have time to feel bored.

Because boreout is not always recognized as a serious issue, many people do not receive the understanding or support they need. Nevertheless, this condition can be improved if you begin by observing yourself and making suitable changes step by step.

Here are several possible approaches:

- First, ask yourself when this feeling began, where it may have come from, and whether any factors are making it worse. You may also ask whether you currently want to take on a new role, a new task, or a responsibility that feels more meaningful. This can be a valuable time for reflection and self-understanding.
- At work, you can consider talking to your manager about taking on more responsibility, joining a new project, or trying a different type of task. If your company has multiple departments, interacting more closely with colleagues from other teams may also help broaden your perspective and create a stronger sense of connection.
- Make time to strengthen existing relationships and build new ones. If you worry about not fitting in, you can begin with small gatherings, casual meetings with familiar friends, or social events where you can meet both people you already know and new acquaintances.
- If possible, travel or place yourself in a different environment. Observing, listening to, and experiencing the rhythm of an unfamiliar place can remind you that the world is still full of variety, and that you still have the capacity to feel, explore, and change.

Boreout is not simply a passing moment of boredom at work. It may be a sign that you are lacking challenge, connection, or a sense of meaning in your work and life. Instead of immediately denying the problem or giving everything up, it is more important to listen to your own state, name the issue clearly, and gradually regain a sense of agency.