22 Tools to Overcome Grumpiness

How not to be grumpy at work (or in the rest of your life)

David Zinger
22 Tools to Overcome Grumpiness

Some people have told me that I’m grumpy; it’s not something that I’m aware of. It’s not like I walk around poking children in the eye... not very small ones, anyway.

~Dylan Moran

grom·y •grim-pē\ : easily annoyed or angered : having a bad temper or complaining often : sulky, bad-tempered, crabby, ill-tempered, short-tempered, crotchety, tetchy, testy.

This book was illustrated and designed by John Junson

22 Tools to Overcome Grumpiness - How not to be grumpy at work (or in the rest of your life) by David Zinger
Why you should read this book

Because grumpiness is a downer for everyone, especially for you. It is not an endearing trait. It sucks the energy and life out of work. The 22 tips in this book will bring life back into your work and wellbeing back into your life.

Reading Time for the Book = 9 minutes, 30 seconds.
Find your G-spots

Your G-spots are the spots, interactions, thoughts and triggers that make you grumpy. Perhaps it is being thwarted in an action or maybe being snubbed or not getting enough sleep. Catch your triggers before they catch you and cause you to sink into a grumpy funk.
Be mindful of grumpiness

Grumpiness does something to you and it also does something for you. What is the benefit of being grumpy? What is the source of being grumpy? Does getting to the source of your grumpiness offer you insight or perspective on constructive actions you can take? Rather than being triggered into grumpiness, use the experience of being grumpy as a trigger to take constructive action to address the source.
Assume the best intentions

Before you create a negative melodrama at work about what she said or what he did, start by assuming the best intentions about the behavior of others. Just because you start with good intentions does not mean that you have to stay there but begin with good intentions and ask questions or hold a conversation to check out other people’s behavior. Assuming best intentions will stop a downward grumpy spiral and pave the pathway to constructive action.
Pause for 90 seconds

Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, a brain researcher who studied her own stroke from the inside out, suggested that the shelf life of an emotion is 90 seconds. Yet many of us hold on to an emotion for years, if not the rest of our lives. Give yourself 90 seconds from the moment you feel grumpy before you act on that emotion. Also know that you must feed your grumpiness every 90 seconds to keep it alive. We feed it with fragments of tragic stories, feelings of being wronged, and a multitude of tiny, almost unconscious mechanisms, to keep being grumpy. If you remain grumpy ninety seconds after the initial emotion it is essential to ask yourself: “How am I feeding my grumpiness to keep it alive?”
Drop your entitlement

You are not entitled. When you think you are entitled and you do not receive the expected entitlements it creates grumpiness. I don’t care if you have been working 30 years or you have a big office or you are a new hire with exaggerated expectations…drop the sense of entitlement and watch your grumpy meter fall.
Steer clear of energy suckers

Grumpiness can be a staff infection. Avoid Debbie Downer and Negative Nellie. Who you hang out with can kindle and ignite your grumpiness or add fuel to the fire of your negative state. Ensure that you don’t become one of those energy suckers. When you are inflicted with the grumpy staff infection, experience and express it in isolation to lessen the contamination to others.
Help someone else

Grumpiness tends to be a self-absorbed state of mind. Get out of your self-focused shell and do something for someone else, especially when you don’t feel like it. Emotions and attitudes follow behavior so don’t wait to feel altruistic to act altruistically. You will find that your grumpiness is diminished after an act of kindness.

22 Tools to Overcome Grumpiness - How not to be grumpy at work (or in the rest of your life) by David Zinger
Work with not for

We often feel useless when we believe we are at the bottom of the pyramid. Our language around upper management, front lines, and report up, create and sustain a sense of being subservient. We are equal in our humanity within the organization and there is no “real” up or down, top or bottom. Stop believing that you work for someone or for an organization. Make yourself a partner by knowing and acting in ways that demonstrate that you work with others not for them.
Fixate for 15 minutes

Stop the internal chatter and external negative behavior that swirls around being grumpy. Find a task and work with full focus on it for the next 15 minutes. Set a timer, on your phone or watch, for 15 minutes. When the timer chimes after 15 minutes check back into your grumpiness. You will be amazed how often it has dissipated, if not disappeared.
Stop simplistic characterizations

Avoid the miserable mental gymnastics of seeing people as good guys, bad guys, or helpless pawns. You are not a victim, there are few real villains at work, and stop pretending there is nothing you can do about your situation, beyond feeling grumpy and ranting incessantly about how bad everything is.
Seize the moment

Ask yourself what you can do in the next moment to stop being grumpy. You don’t have to be happy just transition from reverse into neutral.
Neutralize the neural almond brothers

The amygdalae are two almond shaped parts of the brain that are the source of emotion and drive. When you are grouchy the amygdalae are running the brain. These “almond brothers” are unreliable drivers for your work. Because the amygdalae is not a language center you can remove them from the driver’s seat by asking yourself a question. There are good questions and bad questions. A bad question is: “What’s wrong with those people?” A good question is: “How can I look at this differently to short circuit my grouchesness?”
Expect setbacks

Teresa Amabile, and her husband, Steven Kramer, demonstrated that the biggest source of daily disengagement is setbacks. We need to expect the inevitability of setbacks while not sinking into grouchiness when they occur. A setback does not in and of itself create upset. We can learn from setbacks, we can experience the loss without getting grumpy, we can bond with other, and resolve to keep going. Watch professional tennis players like Serena Williams or Novak Djokovic bounce back after a bad call or a double fault. It is inspiring to watch a figure skater fall at the Olympics and get right back on her feet and land a quad.
Grow out of a fixed mindset

The gestalt of grumpiness is based on mindset. Carol Dweck encourages us to distinguish between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. Know that being right all the time is wrong even if you are right. In the fixed mindset, every situation calls for a confirmation of your intelligence, personality, or character. The growth mindset focuses on the belief that you can change and grow through effort and experience. To fix a grumpy mindset you need to believe you can grow out of it.
See what you can do

When my youngest son was an 8-year old hockey goalie, he aced the idea of being neutral. He knew he would get scored on and it would never bother him or be a source of post game grumpiness. I asked him how he mentally prepared to go into the net before each game and he told me he just said to himself, “I’ll see what I can do.” I loved his statement; it was neutral, open, curious, and constructive. Tomorrow when you go to work I encourage you to just go in to “see what you can do.” Of course, watch out if someone shoots a puck at you!
Don’t let skeptical become cynical

I like skeptics. They are the best people to conduct experiments. But there is a fine line between being a healthy skeptic and a grumpy cynic. I believe that a cynic is often locked into a negative view and is not open to having their grouchy beliefs and declarations disputed. Here is the short test to determine if you have moved from skeptic to cynic: Can you be skeptical about your cynicism?
Drop your security blanket

Being grouchy for an extended period begins to feel like a toxic security blanket. It feels familiar and it may even feel safe. But what this toxic security blanket often covers are your fears. Fear is one of the primary causes of grumpiness. Do you fear being wrong, being left behind, not belonging, unable to handle setbacks and challenges, being successful, failing at your work, interacting with someone in authority, or a host of other fears? It is helpful to have a friend, family member, coach, or counsellor help you uncover the fears masked by grumpiness. Dr. David Martin taught that the only way to overcome a fear is to experience it while also feeling safe. The safety found in a supportive relationship was the mechanism that extinguished the fear.
Transform grumpiness into engaged working

It takes a lot of energy to be grumpy. Unfortunately it is a constant energy drain for yourself and others. Energy is the raw material of employee engagement. If you let go of some of the grumpiness you may be left with energy to engage more fully in your work. This use of energy often results in an energy gain as opposed to an energy drain and as you learn to fully engage in work you may also fully experience how work makes us well.
Empathy cracks up grumpiness

Empathy is our ability to fully understand others. It is not an expression of mushy emotion, it is the courage to leave our own views and perspectives behind. For grumpy people, empathy is a rare commodity. Empathy cracks the hard and brittle shell of grumpiness. Leonard Cohen sang, “there is a crack, a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.”
Develop gritty, real and authentic optimism

We confuse optimism with shallow positive thinking. Martin Seligman taught that optimists see bad events, they are not naive and superficial thinkers. After a bad event, rather than gravitate towards grumpy, optimistic people view the bad event as temporary, specific, and they don’t blame themselves for what occurred. They recover. They are resilient. They bounce back. Embrace a sense of impermanence after a bad event and you move from grumpiness to equanimity.
Give yourself fully to one grumpy day

Take one day a year to get fully into grumpiness. Exaggerate it. Find and wear an Oscar the Grouch costume and let your expressions of grumpiness permeate each moment and every relationship. You will find it a challenge to be grumpy all day as you get exhausted continually cursing others and your fate. You might see the humor of it. Those who laugh can’t make grumpiness last. A Chinese beatitude states: blessed are those who can laugh at themselves they shall never cease to be entertained.
Realize the benefits of being grumpy free

Other people will not avoid you by ducking into the nearest cubicle when they spot you walking towards them. You will have stronger relationships at work and at home. Your team will be stronger and accomplish more. You will look forward to work with anticipation rather than dread. You will show up to each moment with more energy, awareness, connection, and caring. You won’t bring the nastiness of work home with you.
The last harrumph

Let your harrumph become a heartfelt hurrah. If you choose to dwell in grumpiness know that you will never fully experience the possibility that **work can make you well**. When you decide to stop being grumpy you will experience more space in your life for real joy, happiness, and well-being. Bad does not have to trump good when we master the 22 tools to overcome grumpiness. Overcoming grumpiness will transform your last harrumph into your first hurrah!

Now you’re ready to make the journey from harrumph to hurrah!
David Zinger is an employee engagement speaker and expert from Canada who works around the world on leadership, management, engagement, well-being, and work. He has encountered many grumpy people during his sixty years. David is firm in his resolve to not become a grumpy old man while also helping others use the 22 tools to overcome their downward fall into grumpiness.

If you would like David’s assistance on employee engagement, engaged well-being or overcoming grumpiness contact him at:

david@davidzinger.com

Phone: 204 254 2130

Website: www.davidzinger.com

This book was designed and illustrated by John Junson

jbjunson@gmail.com