



## **Betrayal: When Job or Career Leads to Disappointment**

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## Introduction

Nothing surpasses the euphoria experienced when finalizing a career choice or successfully completing the job search process with a job offer. Excitement and dreams blend to present a positive picture filled with anticipation, commitment, motivation, opportunities, and success. These feelings represented the culmination of hard work needed to earn a post-secondary or higher degree and obstacles overcome in the competitive job market. Sometimes, however, career and job dreams of *happily ever after* do not come true and feelings of betrayal become a reality. Questions surface regarding previous decision-making and feelings of self-doubt and disappointment prevail. In this paper, the authors offer hope and advice to those experiencing the realities of job or career betrayal.

## Job Betrayal

Employees invest time, talent, and drive in their job and expect support and fair treatment in return. “Betrayal occurs when an individual is being harmed by the intentional commission (e.g., enacted harm) or omission of behavior (e.g., failure to provide support) by a person whom they once trusted or depended upon” (Park et al., 2010, p. 981). Job betrayal occurs when employees feel deceived by an employer not reciprocating or advocating in return, thus breaching the trust placed in the employer by the employee (Smidt et al., 2023). Feelings of betrayal may result in significant negative consequences and the aftereffects of these consequences impact the employee and organization as evidenced in lowered morale, failure to meet productivity goals, employee burnout, and higher intent to leave an organization.

Job betrayal occurs in various ways. First, job betrayal is a perceived or actual lack of support which occurs when employees feel inadequate support is provided in time of need. Next, is the concept of broken promises happening when employers do not deliver on promises made

to an employee. Unfair treatment manifested in discrimination or favoritism causing a perceived lack of justice within an organization is another example of job betrayal. Finally, misrepresentation of job responsibilities, roles, pay, or corporate culture during recruitment may lead to resentment and further represents examples of job betrayal (Adams-Clark & Freyd, 2021; Brown, 2021; Rachman, 2010).

### **Career Betrayal**

Career fulfillment is achieved through a variety of factors including internal and external motivators. Career betrayal becomes apparent when the chosen career does not match preconceived expectations, possibly caused by “false hope related to positively loaded career promises” (Baruch & Vardi, 2016, p. 355). This betrayal may lead to a downward spiral effect of discontent, boredom, and unhappiness, which may further lead to diminished job performance. Realization does not always occur immediately. Boissiere (2019) described a personal experience with a finance career betrayal before switching to a new career in psychology as a counselor in private practice:

I entered the workforce with all the fervor of an emerging adult. Soon, though, the novelty of finance wore off and was replaced by the very first whispers of that low hum. Little by little it grew, its volume creeping up slowly (para. 4).

Career betrayal is likely to increase in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Due to increases in available career options, embracing a *grass is greener* mentality or an overly optimistic mentality may become more prevalent (Budjanovcanin & Woodrow, 2022). Other situations leading to career betrayal arise from what Akkermans et al. (2018) call *career shocks* or anything that impacts the career trajectory. Employees often do not have the ability to alter the behavior of the betrayer but can instead focus on self-behaviors.

### **Job Betrayal Solutions**

Overcoming betrayal in the workplace is multifaceted and often a lengthy endeavor. Betrayal by a boss results in an inability to trust, negatively impacting optimism and resilience and even impacting the ability to judge complex situations (Carucci, 2019). Employees betrayed in the workplace begin the healing process by holding fast to personal values and understanding the betrayal should not negatively impact future personal values and actions (Reia & Reia, 2015). Betrayed employees should analyze the patterns of betrayal. Tolerating abusive behaviors leads to a belief that the behavior is warranted and perceived as a form of organizational Stockholm syndrome (Agorjan et al., 2012). Being mindful that not everyone is a betrayer is another method of combating job betrayal. Paying close attention to avoid generalizing a boss's betrayal and allowing it to spread to other relationships is another important technique to manage others' betraying behaviors (Lambert et al., 2017).

Betrayed individuals may respond to betrayal by seeking vengeance against the work group or organization instead of the actual betrayer (Stackhouse et al., 2023). This natural desire to exact revenge is likely to reflect on the betrayed employee causing others to see the betrayed as the betrayer. After a betrayal, it is important to acknowledge the betrayal, seek healthy methods of responding to the betrayal, and forego retaliation.

### **Career Betrayal Solutions**

There are several solutions for turning career betrayal into a career-enhancing experience. The first factor to consider is knowing the achieved and honed transferable skills that may be applicable to a new career. Ana et al. (2020) determined that the following skills transfer well within the general business arena: "continuous learning abilities, teamwork ability, communication skills, critical thinking in problem-solving, finding solutions, and creative

competency” (p. 100). Additional skills include listening, adaptability, attention to detail, computer skills, and leadership/management (Pelta, 2024).

Earning a new academic degree may not always be necessary when changing careers. Exploring certifications, certificates, and licenses to demonstrate competencies in a new career discipline may be beneficial. The Indeed Content Team (2023) recommended the following industry certifications in the following: project management, business analyst, supply chain, marketing, skilled trade, human resources, sales, accounting, computer network, and health care.

When contemplating a major change, it is important to network, join professional associations, and seek career counseling related to the new career. Making contacts within the new career discipline and seeking counseling may help in not only securing a new job but also ensure that the realities of the new career choice become more transparent, so as not to incur a second incidence of career choice disappointment (Budjanovcanin et al., 2019)

Another important solution to overcome career betrayal is to adopt a resilience mindset. Embracing change with the proper mindset seems to encourage flexibility and enable individuals to adapt more readily to change. Peeters et al. (2022) noted “encountering disruptions in a career seems to enable individuals to develop competencies to cope with setbacks” (p. 383).

### **Conclusion**

Job or career betrayal is frequently faced during a career, and some will face both, and some will face betrayal multiple times. Gaining an understanding of what these betrayals are and recognizing them is the first step toward working through the betrayal. It is critical for an individual to see betrayal for what the betrayal is and understand the methods necessary to overcome the betrayal. Finding ways to use the betrayal to strengthen and eventually enhance a

career is a key component of long-term career enhancement. Acknowledging the betrayal and seeking ways to leverage the betrayal adds to the resilience and skillset of an individual.

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