

Career envy: how to conquer professional jealousy

By Kristin Kalning / Special to NWJobs

Reagan Halifax was on Facebook when she saw that one of her closest friends from graduate school was on a work trip to Washington, D.C.

"I didn't even know she was working," says Halifax. The otherwise ordinary status update triggered a bit of panic for the Duvall resident, who has a master's degree in education for school counseling. Panic — and career envy. Halifax, 34, only briefly used her degree before deciding to stay home to raise her two kids, now 4 and 6. Her friend, on the other hand, seemed to be "doing it all — raising kids and working. And she's always been very driven in her career, a lot more than me," Halifax says.



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Career envy existed long before social media, but Facebook and LinkedIn make it easier than ever to obsess over who's doing better than you. That doesn't mean you should unplug completely and hide under a rock. Rather, says Seattle executive coach [Lisa Quast](#) (who contributes to NWJobs' [Work Life blog](#)), you can use the green-eyed monster as a catalyst for your own career.

Here are some tips for taming your career envy.

Acknowledge the feeling. Don't ignore your jealousy — figure out why you're feeling it, says Quast. Maybe you didn't realize how bored you were at your job until a friend shared her promotion.

"You want to feel happy for them," Quast says. "But what it can do is open up an emotional door and help you understand how you might not be happy in your own career."

Track it. Time spent envying the good fortune of others is time lost improving your own, says Debiruth Stanford, a counselor and life coach in Bellevue. People usually have no idea how much time they're wasting wallowing in what she calls the trance of comparison.

"Every time that you find yourself comparing yourself to others, make a note of it. Literally, write it down," says Stanford. And then, spend as much or more time on self-discovery, planning and making yourself more attractive to prospective employers as you do envying your friends, classmates and colleagues, she says.

Ask questions. Take a step back from being jealous and think about how you can learn from your successful friends (and your "friends"). Ask the people you admire how they're getting their promotions, or the positions that interest you, advises Quast. Befriend a high-achieving colleague at work, and ask her if she'll mentor you.

Do some behind-the-scenes sleuthing. If it feels weird to ask questions in person, use the Internet to your advantage. Go on LinkedIn and see what separates you from the co-workers and friends you admire, says Quast. Maybe it's a question of more education or more varied experience. Either way, you'll know what steps you can take to get where you want to be.

Surround yourself with successful people. This might mean joining a support group or forming your own, says Stanford. [Meetup.com](#) is a great resource for finding like-minded people doing just about anything.

Or ask a group of trusted friends and family members to be your own personal "board of directors," says Stanford. "If you conduct yourself like a company, you have to think: 'How am I doing business? What are my goals? Am I overperforming or underperforming?'"

Take some steps. Halifax says that when she starts feeling envious of her friends' careers, she takes one little step toward filling the gap on her résumé. "I joined a Washington state counselors association, and I've looked at which universities offer continuing education and professional development." She volunteers, too, which Quast applauds.

"[Of] the people I coach, the ones who put proactive plans together are the ones who don't let the envy get to them, because they're always working to improve themselves," says Quast. "It's that proactivity and positive attitude that will make the difference."

