

How to cope when work gets toxic

Toxic work environments can be a knotty moment to navigate in your Squiggly Career. Negativity within your team or company can take a toll on confidence, creativity, and job satisfaction.

Leaving might not be an immediate option, but there are actions you can take to minimise the impact of a toxic environment, maintain motivation, and protect yourself professionally.

Ideas for action



1. Minimisers - protecting your energy

Toxicity can be draining. To find ways to limit its effect on your energy try:

- 👉 *Building in small moments of light-relief throughout your day (e.g., listening to a funny podcast, meeting a friend who makes you feel better, or taking a proper lunch break).*
- 👉 *Identifying commitments you can step back from - do you need to attend every meeting or take on every project? What can you let go of?*
- 👉 *Focusing on what you're gaining from your role. Are there skills or experiences that will benefit you in the long term?*

2. Energisers - finding ways to re-energise

Finding ways to re-energise can help you stay motivated and balanced. Try:

- 👉 *Connecting with a community outside your daily work, who share your passions or interests and lift your energy.*
- 👉 *Prioritising activities outside work that help you recharge - whether it's a hobby, learning something new, watching a TV programme you enjoy, or reading.*
- 👉 *Finding ways to stretch your strengths e.g. leading a knowledge-sharing session or mentoring a colleague. It can help you rebuild confidence and regain control.*

3. Protectors - taking action when needed

At some point, coping strategies may not be enough, and you may need to take action to protect yourself in the now and in the future.

Consider:

- 👉 *Documenting toxic behaviours and situations - this can help you stay objective (fact vs feeling) and provide evidence if needed.*
- 👉 *If giving feedback is an open, try the COIN model to stay objective and in control of the conversation (Context, Observation, Impact, Next steps). Even if the situation doesn't change, you can draw strength and pride from how you responded.*
- 👉 *Finding an influential mentor outside your company. They can offer a fresh perspective, remind you of your strengths, and help you explore new opportunities if things don't improve.*

Coach yourself questions

How can I limit the time I'm spending in a toxic situation?



What can I add into my day to restore my energy?



Recommended resources



MIT Sloan Management Review article on toxic workplace cultures and their long-term effects.



Join our PodPlus Community to connect with professionals outside your current work environment.



Sarah and Helen discuss how hard moments at work can help us learn in episode **#328** of Squiggly Careers.