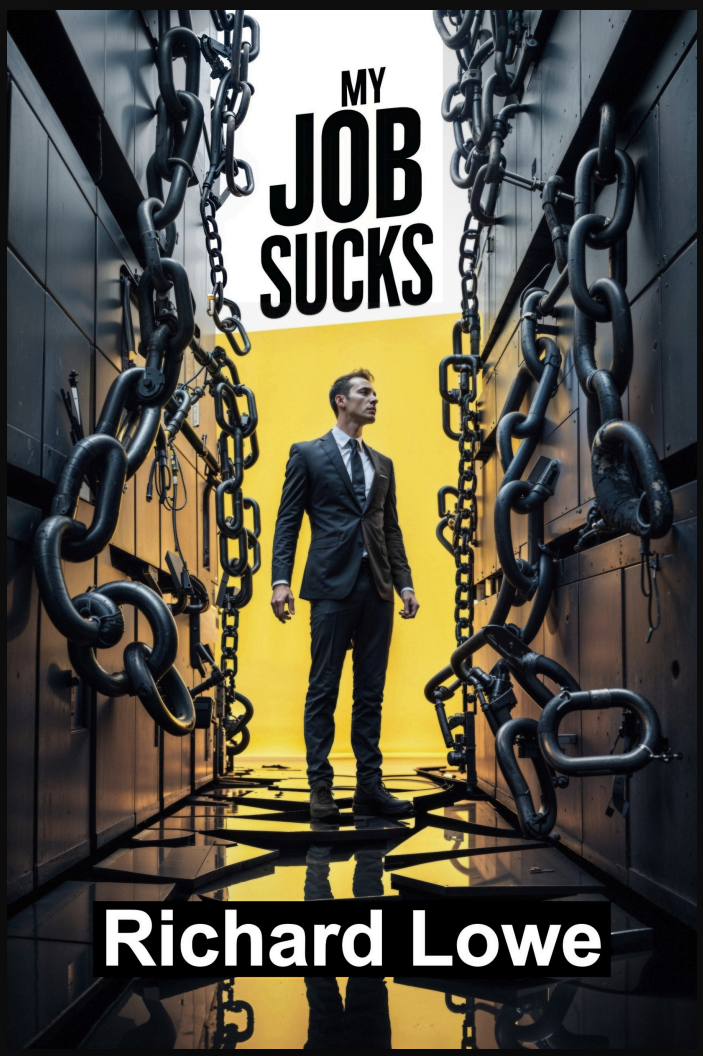
A FREE COMPANION TO MY JOB SUCKS

The Options Workbook

Spot the red flags, read the layoff signals, get paid what you're worth, and build your way out before you need it.



RICHARD LOWE

How to Use This Workbook

The goal is options. With options, you stay on your terms or leave on your terms.

My Job Sucks argues that the old deal between employers and employees is dead, and that you have more power than you've been led to believe. This workbook turns the book's exercises into pages you fill in. Do one part a week. Keep it at home, never at work.

1. **What you want**, written down honestly.
2. **The red flag translator**, for your next interview.
3. **The layoff early warning system**, and your own records.
4. **The fear inventory**, and a check on your mental health.
5. **The pay worksheet**, with four scripts.
6. **The exit plan**, built while you don't need it.

> *You're not lucky to have a job. They're lucky to have you.*

Part 1: What You Want

Write down what you want from work, not what seems realistic. The book's five people want reasonable things.

PERSON	WHAT THEY WANT	ME?
Sarah	Work that uses her brain, real recognition, and the freedom to solve problems her way	
Marcus	A reasonable link between doing good work and still having a job next year	
Priya	To leave at 5:30 without the guilt trip	
David	A piece of the value he creates, instead of a gift card and a handshake	
Elena	Pay and a title that match the expert she already is	

What would make me excited about Monday morning:

_____

Three changes I could make in the next six months:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Part 2: The Red Flag Translator

Toxic workplaces advertise their toxicity openly. They just use coded language. Take this page to every interview.

WHAT THEY SAY	WHAT IT USUALLY MEANS
“We're like family here”	Guilt when you set boundaries, and work you'll be pushed to do for free
“We work hard and play hard”	Overwork is celebrated, and the drinks are the coping mechanism
“Unlimited PTO”	Time off so guilt-laden nobody takes it, and no payout when you leave
“Rockstars,” “ninjas,” “gurus”	Superhuman demands for regular human pay
“Fast-paced environment”	No planning, so everything is a crisis
“Competitive salary”	Below market, and they hope you don't know it
“Flexible hours”	You'll work nights and weekends
“Wear many hats”	Three jobs for one salary
“Young, dynamic team”	They don't hire older workers or value experience
“Results-oriented culture”	Hit your numbers whatever it does to you
“Startup mentality”	Big-company results with garage-level resources

Questions to ask them

- ☐ “What does work-life balance look like here?”
- ☐ “How do you handle competing priorities and unrealistic deadlines?”
- ☐ “Can you tell me about someone who's succeeded here and what made them successful?”
- ☐ “What happened to the last person in this role?”

Watch how long they take to answer and whether they deflect. Meet the people you'd work with. Look for patterns in employee reviews. Get responsibilities, pay, benefits and vacation in writing before you accept.

My non-negotiables (absolute requirements only): _____

_____

Part 3: The Layoff Early Warning System

Companies telegraph layoffs months before they happen if you know what to look for. Check this list once a month.

Month: _____

- [ ] Hiring freeze
- [ ] Budget cuts
- [ ] Consultants visiting, especially "organizational efficiency" firms
- [ ] Leadership changes, or new leadership with new priorities
- [ ] Vague announcements about a "strategic review"
- [ ] Executives talking about efficiency, optimization or "streamlining operations"
- [ ] Declining revenue or missed targets
- [ ] More debt or pressure from investors
- [ ] A merger or acquisition
- [ ] Earnings calls that mention "optimizing headcount"

0 to 2 signs	3 to 5 signs	6 or more
Keep building your options at a normal pace.	Update your resume and start reaching out to your network.	Start looking now, while you still have a paycheck and bargaining power.

Your own records

- [ ] I keep a running record of projects finished, problems solved and praise received
- [ ] My notes live on my own device, never the company's
- [ ] I never forward confidential company files to my personal email
- [ ] I write down workplace incidents with dates, and save the emails
- [ ] I get performance feedback in writing and respond in writing
- [ ] I know I don't sign a severance agreement on the spot

HR's job is to protect the company. If you have a real legal complaint, talk to an employment lawyer early. An EEOC charge usually has to be filed within 180 days, or 300 in most states.

Part 4: The Fear Inventory

The prison has no walls or bars. It's made of fear, convenience and learned helplessness.

Write down what worries you most about leaving. Then ask whether each fear rests on evidence or on assumption.

THE FEAR	EVIDENCE OR ASSUMPTION?	WHAT WOULD ADDRESS IT
Money: I can't afford to leave		
“I'm lucky to have a job”		
I'm not qualified for anything better		
I've put in too many years to walk away		
I'm too old to start over		
My family thinks any job beats no job		
Golden handcuffs: options, bonuses, vesting		

Replace “How much have I invested in this job?” with “What opportunities am I missing by staying?”

Your mind: a two-week check

Rate your mood from 1 (awful) to 5 (fine) and look for patterns that point to your job.

	SUN NIGHT	MON AM	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Week 1							
Week 2							

What at work hurts most (manager, workload, colleagues, culture, the work): _____

Who I'll call when it gets to be too much: _____

If trouble sleeping, pulling away from people or losing interest in things you loved starts spilling into the rest of your life, get professional help. If you ever think about hurting yourself, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, right away.

Part 5: The Pay Worksheet

Your worth is set by what others will pay for your work, not by your needs, your effort or your loyalty.

QUESTION	MY ANSWER
Market range for my role, from recruiters and people in similar jobs	
My base salary now	
My real hourly rate, counting overtime and weekends	
What my benefits and equity are really worth in cash	
Three wins I can put a number on	
The smallest increase I'd accept, and what would make me leave	

Four scripts from the book

1. **They ask your expectations first.** "I want to make sure we're aligned before I give you a number. Can you share the budgeted range for this role?"

2. **A lowball offer.** "I'm genuinely excited about this role and I want to make this work. Based on my research into market rates for this level of experience and responsibility, I was expecting something closer to [your target number]. Is there flexibility to get there?" Then stop talking.

3. **"That's our best offer."** "I'm genuinely interested in joining the team, but I need to be somewhere in that range to make this work. What can we do?" If they hold firm, move to signing bonus, remote days, title, an earlier review, a training budget or extra PTO.

4. **A raise mid-cycle.** Ask right after a visible win, with a specific number: "I think there's a gap between what I'm being paid and what this role is worth right now. I'd like to discuss getting to [specific number]."

Part 6: The Exit Plan

The best time to plan your exit is when you don't need to leave.

FREEDOM FUND MATH	AMOUNT
Monthly survival budget (housing, food, utilities, transportation, insurance, debt)	
× 12 = the low end of the goal	
× 18 = the high end of the goal	
Saved so far, in a separate account	
Automatic monthly transfer	

The sequence

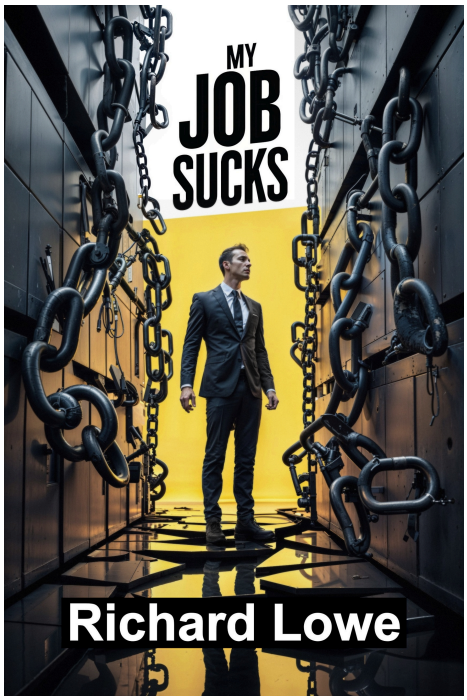
1. **Decide,** then take stock of where the finances actually stand.
2. **Reduce exposure.** Cut anything that isn't essential.
3. **Search in parallel.** Look while you still have the job, and expect it to take longer than you'd like.
4. **Keep the mask on.** Tell nobody, and change nothing visible: not your effort, your attitude, or how you deal with your boss.
5. **Treat an offer as an offer.** It's a conditional agreement until you're through the door.
6. **Give notice.** If your boss is shocked, you protected the process.

MILESTONE	TARGET DATE	DONE
Freedom fund reaches twelve months		
A skill that carries to other industries		
Relationships outside my company and industry		
Portfolio of documented achievements		
Side income tested (off company time and equipment)		

> *Start building your exit strategy now, while you don't need it.*

The Whole Story

This workbook is the short version. My Job Sucks covers the whole game: what each level of management wants from you, sociopathic bosses, toxic coworkers, why HR is not your friend, remote work, AI-proof skills, escape routes and building a life around work instead of through it.



My Job Sucks:
Taking Back Control of Your Working Life
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