

Medicate to the Fast Track?: A reader wonders if that high-powered job is right for her

Dear C and Dr. B;

I used to work in a corporate position that involved managing many people. The job left me stressed out and I had a hard time keeping up. I got depressed, anxious and sought professional help on the urging of my parents and family. I was placed on Adderall and everything changed. I aced the job and my family was overjoyed - they thought I was a new, better person and were proud because they are all high profile professionals.

My husband, on the other hand, said I wasn't the same person he married. He claimed I'd become irritable and hyper-focused, I'd lost my spontaneity and was no longer fun. So I stopped taking the medication, quit that job and now work a small, low paid front desk job, greeting people and processing their information. I love it! I talk to people all day long and meet new people every day.

The problem? My family thinks I am nuts working this low paying job. They see no value in it. They say I am wasting my life and could be doing so much better. They want me to go back on my medications and if my husband doesn't like me that way, it's his problem not mine! Are they right? I like my life now, but am I just giving into pressure from my husband? LayLo

Dr. B says: Just because you can function on medication in the corporate job doesn't mean you should. That role wasn't suited to you and being a square peg in a round hole really sucks, even with a pharmacological lube job.

What I've seen over time is that when a person gets trapped in an ill-suited role, they might succeed at it, but it can always feel fake - like it's an act being played for others. That can be stressful and depressing. When the medication loses its effect due to building tolerance, more and more is necessary, which causes more side effects. With stimulants you can expect irritability, anxiety, insomnia, short temper and headaches. It's similar to caffeine withdrawal but much worse; it's a scenario that I do not recommend.

A Harvard study showed that there are 11 different types of learning styles. Our schools and culture gear toward only two of them. Everyone else is seen as a misfit and is not valued; I see this as a mistake. I am very happy you found a niche that suits you, and that you have a husband who

appreciates you for who you are. If you were to leave him, marry a “successful” partner, and rise up the cooperate ladder on medication that increases your efficiency but diminishes your other qualities, I fear that one day we would read about you in the paper: “She had everything, why did she commit suicide?”

Be happy.

C says: I couldn't agree more. We need to better understand the difference between mental illness and “different” personalities.

The DSM5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) defines mental illness as “A behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual which reflects an underlying psychobiological dysfunction, the consequences of which are clinically significant distress (eg, a painful symptom) or disability (ie, impairment in one or more important areas of functioning). Translation: If your “symptoms” are interfering with your life in a negative way, then you may be suffering from a mental illness. I'd say, additionally, that if you are pleased with your behavior, but it's destructive and dangerous to those around you, you are also very likely afflicted with a mental illness. The flip side of that coin is this - if you CAN live with your symptoms, and they don't interfere with your life, or with those of innocent bystanders, you may not be mentally ill at all, just different from the national standard.

What isn't suitable for one person can be just the thing for another. A perfect example of this is a Rescue & Search Dog. These heroic animals are most often first discovered at the local pound, where they were abandoned by their owners. Why? Because the very behavior and personality that makes for an ideal Search Dog makes for the Family Pet From Hell. Same animal, wrong job.

Are you happy? Good for you. It would be nice if your family was happy for you too.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com