

HOPPING BACK ON THE HAMSTER WHEEL

Work is woeful and all you want to do is quit. Hold up, says Vicki Notaro, you might want to rethink that.

Ever feel like a hamster in a wheel, running and running without a break? Call it stress, call it a quarter-life crisis, even call it boredom – whatever it is, you're burnt out, and the feeling that you're an unwilling passenger on a non-stop juggernaut is an indication that you're currently unhappy with your work-based lot, and desperate to make a change.

When you feel like you're both stagnating and stretched during the 9-5, the reaction of many young women is to go about affecting change. That's because we've been taught that inaction is a sin.

Primed to think the grass is automatically greener, and that you're wasted in say, finance, you reckon you should be off carving out a career as a webtrepreneur instead.

And yes, it does work for some people – like those women you read

about, who jacked in their jobs and created an über-successful start-up. But the fact is, they either got lucky or had very good resources backing them up.

No, of course we're not in the habit of telling people that they can't do what they aspire to at STELLAR, but what's the problem with advising caution? Especially when we're talking about walking away from something you've spent years building up; that little old thing called a life.

"If you feel like packing in your job, there's a reason," says

Fiona Brennan, creator of semi-self-help website, thepositivehabit.com.

"But it may not be the job that's at the root of the problem, especially if you enjoy your work. The issue probably lies more in your ability to manage the inevitable stress that comes with most work."

Sound familiar? In wanting to give it all up and move to a new city or join a colony of nudists, you may just be desperately desiring a little more control over your own life.

DOWN UNDER BLUNDER

Sarah, 29, knows all about it. Stressed to bits in the past, she walked away from a fantastic job in publishing. When she looks back, it was the right thing to do because she was burnt out, but she's had to work very hard to establish herself since. And she does have the odd day when she wonders if she was too rash in leaving, and where she'd be now if she'd stayed.

She's not alone. Niamh, 32, was lamenting her old life in Australia after several years back in the Emerald Isle, so last year she upped sticks Down Under again, only to find the life she left behind there was very different.

"It was foolish to let work stress and day dreaming get the better of me. I was in a good place, but I couldn't see the grass for the trees. Now I'm back in Ireland and making a go of things again, but it definitely hasn't been easy – it felt like starting over, yet again."

So how do you know if you should stay or go? "The first step is to use awareness to identify what's draining you and then take both practical and mental steps to respond to the situation," advises Fiona. "On

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a psychological level, it's essential to have an internal support mechanism that encourages you when you feel drained or negative," she stresses.

"It's understandable that you may feel overwhelmed, as the human mind can only cope with so much information – the key is not allowing yourself to reach that state," she says.

That said, Fiona's also an advocate of going with your base instincts, and says that in some circumstances, more than a rest is required: a change is what's needed.

"The first thing to do is to trust your gut. If you feel you're consistently unhappy, unfulfilled and unappreciated, then a change is paramount and it's evident that the problem does indeed stem from your circumstances rather than your attitude."

The change needn't be seismic. It could be as small as switching up your commute or changing where you buy your lunch. It might be a matter of dipping a toe in the waters of the outside world by applying for a new job, doing an interview – and maybe even nabbing the role.

Fiona says there's something else at play though, and that's fear; both that things will never change for you, or that they'll change beyond recognition.

"At the root of a lot of fear is self-esteem and self-doubt issues coupled with fear of the unknown and of change. It's also possible that you've become 'institutionalised,'" she says.

WALK THE LINE

Don't wait until your situation is intolerable, because then you'll feel like any change is beyond your control. But nor should you be hasty either. Yep, it's complicated.

The antidote? Take time to reflect, regroup and contemplate the present and the future without allowing your more base desires to run riot and derail you. Only with a good bit of self-reflection will you find the path to the career-based bliss that's right for you. 