IS QUITTING ALWAYS A BAD THING?

Nicole Elphick explains why quitting is for winners.
Quitting might have a bad rep, but one of the best life decisions I ever made involved being a giant giver-upper. At university I received a Commerce scholarship – pretty much The Devil Wears Prada of scholarships that “a million girls would die for”. I’d applied after a careers counsellor advised me not to pursue my preferred vocation of journalism because it was such a competitive industry. Since I had no idea what else I wanted to do, it made sense to take the scholarship. It took me just six months to realise that I wasn’t cut out to be a captain of industry, but it was another two years before I mustered the courage to quit. I’d felt a weight of obligation to see through my commitment, but I now realise that a by-product of living is occasionally making a choice that sets your life in a direction you don’t want to follow – and that it takes guts to find the path you truly want to take. Fast-forward five years and I’m happily working as a journalist. The scholarship was a great opportunity, but it wasn’t the right opportunity for me.

**YOU’VE LOST THAT LOVIN’ FEELING**

It’s not only in your career where quitting can be smart. Ending a ho-hum relationship can leave you free to find true love, as Jasmine, 30, discovered. “I was with my ex, Michael”, from when I was 22. He told me early on that he wasn’t cut out to be a captain of what were mining out on by remaining in this situation. I just didn’t feel right.” (A year after the break-up) I met a lovely guy, we’ve been together for two years and I can see us building a life together, whereas I could never picture a future together with Michael.” It’s important to remember that quitting isn’t always an ending – it can also be a new beginning.

Dubner suggests focusing on ‘opportunity costs’ instead. This is the cost of what we’re missing out on by pursuing a wrong path. By being with a guy or in a job you aren’t passionate about, you could be passing up the chance to find your perfect match.

**OPPORTUNITY CALLS**

**Why are we so reluctant to quit a less-than-ideal situation?** In his recent podcast “The Upside of Quitting”, Freakonomics (Penguin, $24.95) co-author Stephen Dubner discussed the economic theory of “sunk costs” as an reason (don’t turn the page, I promise this is interesting!)

“*A sunk cost* is just what it sounds like: time or money you’ve already spent. The sunk-cost fallacy is when you tell yourself that you can’t quit because of all that time or money you spent. We shouldn’t fall for this fallacy, but we do it all the time,” says Dubner. In fact, by not quitting, we waste even more time and energy justifying our original decision.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE QUITTING**

Unsure whether to take the plunge? Answer these first.

1. Am I currently happy?
2. Am I mainly worried what others will think if I quit?
3. What will I lose if I leave?
4. What opportunities am I missing out on by remaining in this situation?
5. Do I regret my decision at all?

**PUT YOURSELF FIRST**

We also don’t like to quit because... well, who likes to be called a quitter? Quitters are perceived as lazy and people want to avoid that tag so they look good to others. Dr Rebecca Pinkus, lecturer in psychology at the University of Western Sydney, explains it like this: “Self-discrepancy theory says that people make comparisons between their actual self (what they think they’re like) and their ought self (what they think other people want them to be). The ought self is about the duties we think we have to fulfill to live up to others’ expectations. When there’s a discrepancy between a person’s actual and ought selves, they can experience guilt and anxiety.”

Living life based on what we think others want (which might not even be accurate) seems a bad way to exist. When considering ending something, try to focus on your feelings and goals, rather than thinking about what others expect. “Knowing when to quit is an important part of developing yourself,” says psychologist Ingeborg Vrieed. “Unfortunately, often we prefer not to be true to ourselves and our thoughts get in the way of our own success.”

Still need an extra burst of bravery to quit something you aren’t satisfied with? Perhaps the best advice comes from Jasmine, post break-up. “My biggest lesson was to never hold onto something because you’re too afraid to let go. I don’t regret my decision at all.”

*Names have been changed*