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Burned-out millennials are quitting lucrative jobs

By Doree Lewak

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Sarah Solomon in Hawaii.

Sarah Solomon

Sarah Solomon had a pretty sweet life. The 20-something publicist was always out at fashion events, dinners and parties — and even hung out with John Legend during Fashion Week.

“It was definitely New York glamorous — the black dress, leather pants and high heels, and an hour putting on my makeup,” says Solomon. “Anyone would think I had a really fun life, meeting cool people and celebrities.”

But she yearned for something more and resented only having two weeks of vacation a year. So, last August, she quit her seemingly great job at a plum downtown p.r. firm.

“I wanted to travel more — I didn’t want to have to ask for time off and grovel for extra days, you know?” says Solomon, now 25 and living in a rental house in Kauai, Hawaii, overlooking the beach.

Over the past 10 months, she’s scaled volcanoes in Guatemala, soaked up the waterfalls of Bali, Indonesia, and basked on glorious beaches halfway around the world. She gets by doing freelance p.r. work on the road, so long as she can get decent Wi-Fi in paradise.

“I do have to budget more, but the freedom is so worth it,” she says. “There are different ways to do work . . . The world is changing.”

The traditional concept of employment is the latest thing that the ever-contrarian millennial generation is reinventing. They’re quitting their jobs, without worrying about what they’ll do next. According to a [2018 Millennial Survey by Deloitte](#), 43 percent of millennials expect to leave their job within two years. The trend is in line with broader shifts. According to the Labor Department, the percentage of workers (of any age) quitting their jobs reached 2.4 percent in May, [the highest level in more than 16 years](#).



Sarah Solomon at a PR event in NYC.
Sarah Solomon

“Twenty years ago I never would have seen this,” says Cat Graham, a managing partner in a human resources advisory firm who has 20 years of experience in HR. “The job market is so hot right now — unemployment is at a record low, and the war for talent is hotter than ever. There are more jobs than there are qualified candidates.”

Solomon’s boyfriend, Tim Mason, is also a quitter.

Three years ago — long before the two met — he left a good-paying job selling software at a top consulting company in New Jersey.

Sitting at work, he says, he saw his whole life flash before his eyes: 50-hour work weeks with a measly 10 days of vacation every year — and he didn’t like it one bit.

“Nothing was wrong with the job — it was a great company, good money, six figures. I was 26 and I said, ‘Why am I going to spend my 20s sitting at a desk?’ ” says Mason, now 29. “We’re waiting for retirement at 67, and they keep bumping it up — who knows what age it will be for me — 70s? I thought it was foolish not to [leave].”

And, he adds, “I was the top sales guy for three years before I left. I did the Michael Jordan thing — I went out on top.”

Mason has since traveled around the world, visiting more than 30 countries. He and Solomon met at a hostel for surfers in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua, just a few days after she left New York.

“We were both chasing this dream in Nicaragua at the same time,” says Mason, who earns money by occasionally working as a scuba instructor.

He and Solomon have been in Hawaii for three months and plan to stay through the end of the summer. After that, they’re uncertain where they’ll go.

“I do plan to have kids and have somewhat of a normal life again, but it’s not something I’m really worried about now,” says Mason. If and when he does go back to a more traditional job, he says, “I need to be free to manage myself.”

Graham has a less carefree attitude and cautions against giving notice if you don’t know what you’ll do next.

“It’s smart to stretch yourself and your experiences, but it’s not smart to quit a job without a plan,” she says. “The economy will change in six months, and nothing is a guarantee.”

If you do decide to go hang out in Bali for a year, Graham says you have to be careful about how you spin it to potential employers when you re-enter the workforce.

“You better have a solid and authentic narrative,” she says.

And not every millennial is living their #bestlife after leaving a job.

“I quit and I have nothing lined up — and I am bugging,” says Jessica, a 35-year-old who lives in Clinton Hill and ditched her Department of Education school counselor job in June, after seven years, because she could no longer “deal.”

“I was at the point of, like, stay and wish I was dead — or leave and be full of anxiety. But at least have some sort of hope that change was a-brewing,” says Jessica, who declined to give her last name. She’s unsure of what she’ll do next and hasn’t been seriously searching for a new job.

“I’m beyond anxious — I can’t even enjoy my summer because I don’t know what’s happening with my life,” she says.

But most millennial quitters seem to have no regrets.

Last summer, Gracie Halpern, 31, ditched her six-figure gig as a copywriter at a major creative agency and hasn’t looked back.

While she was flush with cash and had the external trappings of a successful life, she felt empty in her old job.

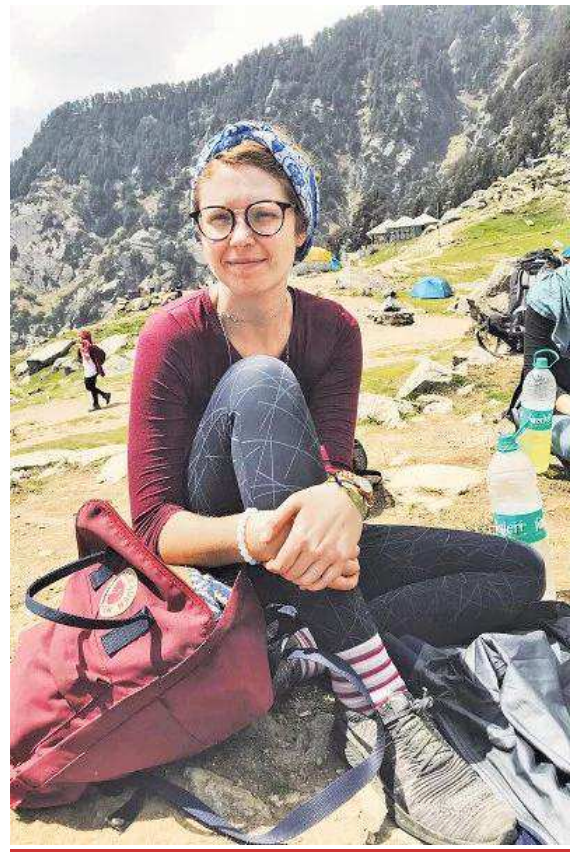
“I had all this money, but I spent it all on therapy and healers,” she says. “I started having these panic attacks where I’d wake up and think, ‘This can’t be my life’ — I was stressed and overworked. I was so scared [to leave] with nothing lined up.”

She gave up her Lower East Side apartment and headed to Bali.

“I read an article online about where you should travel solo based on your zodiac sign — I’m a Pisces — and didn’t really have a plan,” she says. She went on to spend five months in India before returning to the States.

Now, she’s back in her native Northern California, living with her family, freelancing in the advertising world and taking an online career coaching class. While she’s unsure of her next move, she’s at peace.

“The future is unknown and sometimes that feels scary in the West,” she muses. But “life is so short, and the world is so big . . . living an alternative life is possible — our narrow version of success is just that: narrow. ”



Gracie Halpern
Gracie Halpern

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