



How to cope when you are overwhelmed at work

It's your choice

If you can't find any way to change your situation and continue to feel trapped, remind yourself that you chose this job. Remind yourself why. Has it now become something different from what it was when you were hired? Do you still choose it? If not, start updating your resume and talk to someone you can confide in professionally. If you choose to stay, remember that you are there by choice, which must mean that in some way the positives still outweigh the negatives. Try to focus on the positives.

A heavy workload has become the norm and it is easy to feel overwhelmed by it all. The more overwhelmed we feel, the less we are likely to deal with the problem effectively. Sometimes we feel so paralysed we don't know which way to turn.

At that point, stop. Take a deep slow breath, and commit to trying at least four of the solutions below. They fall into two categories – how you think about the situation and how you deal with it.

Avoid becoming a PLOM (Poor Little Old Me)

Once you start being a victim you adopt a role of helplessness which is hard to disengage. Remember there is no knight in shining armour to rescue you. It is your situation and you, more than anyone else, have responsibility for changing it.

Stay in the moment

Don't get caught in the trap of thinking about all the other things that you have on your plate. We finish each task more quickly and easily if we focus on it, instead of worrying about what else we need to do, about the situation in general and about whose fault it is.



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List all your tasks and decide which are not essential

Your first impulse will be that every one of them is absolutely essential. Move past that to decide which tasks are not, bearing in mind that every task serves an end result. In most work situations it is the result that must be achieved, not the process. The process can often be shortened without damage to the result.

Let go of control issues

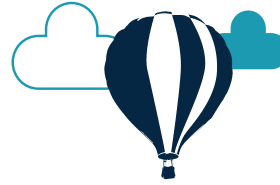
How much of the pressure you are feeling really comes from outside and how much is actually self-imposed?

Delegate

Decide if there is anything that can be delegated, or that more fairly belongs to someone else's workload. Don't just dump it on them – discuss with those involved how work may be distributed more fairly.

Think of solutions

Come up with your own suggested solutions to the work/time crunch and take them to your boss. They will probably be delighted and impressed that you are producing, rather than asking for, ways to solve the problem.



Work loads are often cyclical

The fact that you are rushed off your feet this week does not mean the situation is permanent. What can you legitimately put aside to catch up on when things slow down a bit? This is NOT the same thing as procrastinating.

Take a break

Ten minutes away from your office will do far more to clear your head and your attitude than the work you would achieve in that time sitting at your desk. Lunch breaks exist not just so we can eat but so we may take a mental break. Go for a walk. If there is a park nearby, go there and enjoy the rejuvenating effects of nature. Even better, do some exercise – you will feel so much more mentally alert and able to tackle the issues when you return.

Leave your work at work

Don't let your work problems rent space in your head during the time when you are not supposed to be working. Some people find it helps to develop a mental ritual somewhere between leaving work and getting home.

