

How Learning Microsoft Excel Has Made Me Happier

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I have been reading *Stretch: How to Future-Proof Yourself for Tomorrow's Workplace* by Karie Willyerd and Barbara Mistick, a guide to staying relevant — and happy — in today's workplace. It's well known how many people feel disengaged at work. The authors present the usual statistics on employee engagement, but also provide a career plan for avoiding it. The good news — it's within your control to have a fulfilling career. **Is this why I went to school?** I will be honest. Starting out, I questioned the purpose of my degree given what I was doing at work. College years were incredible. Among my accomplishments, I introduced a *New York Times* bestselling author, had dinner with an editor at *The Wall Street Journal*, and studied with dozens of the brightest students from across the Eastern Mediterranean. So reconciling spreadsheets felt like a downer, to put it lightly. **Excel has made me happier** I wish I could get the hours back that I spent piddling around Excel to build reports, tie out numbers, etc. I did not get the training I needed in college, nor did I know to look for it on my own. So I searched the blogs and forums. While there is a ton of great Excel stuff out there, little applied to my specific situation: a well-educated college grad trying to crack it in “that 9-to-5 life.” So I slogged. And I built. And I started [a blog](#). And through learning Excel, I became a more engaged employee — and a happier person. Don't believe me? Keep reading. **Spend**

more time thinking They likely never told you how much time you'd be spending **wrangling data**. Just today I saw an advertised white paper stating that on average an analyst is drawing from 30 data sources. Weaving this into useful data takes tremendous skill — and time. Copy-and-paste George despaired. Excel-savvy George revels. Data which once would have taken me hours to prepare I can now negotiate in minutes. With this gained time, I am able to do things with the data instead of just counting it. Critical thinking is oxygen at work. Spend all your time with monotonous data preparation and you will wither, angry, and disengaged. **Become a creator** Everyone is creative — yes, even bean-counters. In fact, owning this creativity is key to staying engaged. Spending less time on data preparation allows me to think — and create — in Excel. Dashboards, graphs, models and more come easy and beautifully in Excel. Storytelling with data is a crucial skill for today's economy, and here is the perfect platform. Excel is more than a ledger — it's a creative outlet. **Join a community** When I started blogging, I had no idea there was such an active Excel community. I knew somebody had to be posting that Excel content — but I didn't know they'd be such smart, interesting people. I'm finding my niche here, covering that set of content I found to be lacking — that is, Excel for recent grads and other Excel novices. I've woven business analytics, business economics and more into the platform, too. It's become a platform for all the stuff I wish I'd known starting out as an analyst and couldn't find. And the Excel community has been grateful to have me and help me along the way. Many people look at networking as just knowing people in your hometown or even just in your company. But networking through blogging has really broadened my horizons. I've built a diverse, interesting network that has kept me driven to learn more. And self-compelled, community-driven learning is essential to career success today. **Stretch and Excel** All of us want a fulfilling career — and many of us know that the labor market is changing rapidly. Rampant employee disengagement is not sustainable. Fortunately, Willyerd and Mistick offer an antidote in *Stretch*. Through networking, education, and perseverance, everyone can find fulfilling work. In my case, Excel has been a crucial platform to growing a knowledge base and community. It's made me happier. Now back to the data model!