

MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, GRANT ME THE

greatest Job of all!

Are you dreaming of different career?
These women realised they were
in the wrong job, and they had the
courage to try something new

WORDS NICOLE CURIN-BIRCH PHOTOGRAPHS EMMA BASS

"HOW'S WORK GOING?" is a question many of us get asked a lot, and we don't often stop to think about our response. Consider what you answered last time the question was put to you. If your instinctive response was "great" or "couldn't be better", that's good news, you love your job. But if you usually retort that work is boring or a waste of time, then maybe you need a career change.

This March, a survey by online recruitment company Seek showed that 41% of the 1400 respondents were unhappy with their job, and while there are no accurate statistics covering career change in New Zealand, reports from the US indicate the average number of career changes in a lifetime is three. The Ministry of Education's 2007 Social Report on knowledge and skills shows a 6% increase in the number of women aged 25-39 participating in tertiary education over the last few years. Of these, many will be training for a new career.

Still, it takes a lot of courage to chuck a well-paid job in pursuit of the career of your dreams. And while many people may feel like a change, that doesn't mean they know exactly what they want that change to be.

Career coach Allison Fisher says her clients first visit when they realise they're unhappy. "They feel like they're stuck in a rut and are very unsettled. Often they don't know what they want to do next, which is scary. We all like to know where we're headed and many of my clients have lost that sense of direction," she says.

Allison, who worked as a human resources manager for 15 years before setting herself up as a career coach five years ago, has guided many people through a career change. She advises clients to look back before stepping forward. "The first step is revising where you've been work wise and what your best skills and interests are."

Continued on page 56 →

LEONIE WEARS SHIRT AND PINAFORE DECIJUBA SHOES MOLLINI RED
DRESS TRELISE COOPER VEST AND EARRINGS STYLIST'S OWN



Conservative to creative

Leonie Smyth, 30, was an accountant. Now she's a makeup artist.

There couldn't be two more different job titles. Compliance versus creativity, business meetings versus fashion shows – they're two different worlds. But Leonie Smyth found she excelled at both thanks to her eye for detail.

Good at maths and economics at school, Leonie decided a commerce degree and chartered accountant's papers would set her up for a solid career. "I funded my OE through accountancy, took overseas trips and had some pretty interesting jobs, but I had always had an artistic streak too," she says.

Initially Leonie satisfied her creative cravings by painting in her spare time. But she became increasingly despondent about her day job. "For a while I kept switching jobs, thinking a more challenging role would keep me stimulated," says Leonie. "But I just seemed to be working longer hours with no job satisfaction. I knew I needed a change but I couldn't see a way out."

Then her partner Steve threw her a lifeline. "He saw how miserable I was and said he'd support me – a wonderful gift. When you get to that level it's hard to give everything up."

While she loves painting, Leonie wanted a role with more people contact. "Working as a makeup artist is all about mixing creativity with a desire to get out there and make people happy. It seemed the perfect choice."

When she enrolled at the Samala Robinson Academy she was the oldest person in the class by several years, but this only made her more determined. "My academic background meant I found the theoretical side easy so I focused on the practicalities. I loved it and didn't miss a single day, even if some of the girls joked and called me 'Granny'" she grins.

Nine months on, Leonie works regularly for magazines like Next as well as for private clients. The closest she gets to her previous career is filing her GST and tax returns.

Working as a makeup artist, Leonie has had to downgrade her lifestyle considerably but doesn't mind that she can't spend money as freely. "With such a turnaround in my outlook on life it's been more than worth it." →



Just doing it

Geraline Knox, late 30s, was a lawyer. Now she's a TV presenter.

Geraline Knox proudly lists corporate lawyer, model and actress on her CV and is about to add a new role, TVNZ 7's News at 8 presenter, to that list.

"I get bored and need a change every now and then," laughs Geraline.

Born in Malaysia, Geraline came to New Zealand as a teenager to study law. But when her husband accepted a job back in Malaysia, she made a change. "We arrived back in Malaysia during the economic crisis so there weren't many law jobs around. I'd always acted, mainly as a hobby, so when a new digital network started up I auditioned as a newsreader."

She didn't get the job but when a broadcasting trainer reviewed the audition tapes, he spotted Geraline

and suggested her for a different role.

"I got a phone call offering me a job as an anchor. I was thrown in the deep end and had to learn a lot very quickly."

When her husband's contract finished, the couple came back to New Zealand and Geraline set up a private law practice. But, once bitten by the journalism bug, she wanted more. "When Michael Wilson left *Breakfast Business* I auditioned for the role. I didn't hear anything for ages, then I got a call offering me the TVNZ 7 role."

She jumped at the chance and will be both presenting and co-producing the new show. She aims to keep up with her legal work and is relishing the challenge of running two careers simultaneously. "If you're not happy, you can change that. I love change. It's good for you."

HAIR AND MAKEUP: CLAUDIA RODRIGUES; STYLING: DEBBIE TOKO; GERALINE WEARS: TOP: ANDREA MOORE; BLAZER: LIZ MITCHELL; SARAH WEARS: JEWELLERY: ORSINI COLLECTIONS; SKIRT: LIZ MITCHELL; NURSE'S UNIFORM: SARAH'S OWN; WALLPAPERS: DESIGNERS GUILD; FROM: ICON; TEXTILES: MIRRORS; MAINLY: MIRRORS

Moving forward

Sarah Hutchings, 38, was a midwife. Now she owns a jewellery business.

Sarah Hutchings always knew she wanted to take care of people. Young, clever and enthusiastic she embarked on a nursing and then midwifery degree, and at 22 became one of the country's youngest practising hospital midwives. "I really enjoyed midwifery, it's a great career. You see people at the happiest time in their lives."

Sarah never really thought of doing anything else until she realised her New Zealand qualifications wouldn't pass muster in the UK while on her OE. "When that happened I thought, *I don't really want the hassle of retraining for a job I've been doing for years*, so I started working for a pharmaceutical company instead."

All was going well until Sarah's mother became ill and passed away. "Events like that get you thinking about your life and whether you're really getting what you want out of it. I realised I wasn't happy but I didn't know what to do next."

The answer came when her husband Kent took her to visit the Vicenza jewellery fair in Italy. A self-confessed jewellery fan, Sarah was always on the lookout for beautiful pieces and immediately saw an opportunity. As soon as she came home she began importing European jewellery and created her business, Orsini Collections (www.orsini.co.nz).

The timing couldn't have been better. "Midwifery is hard work – I can't think of a job with more responsibility; you're dealing with people's lives. I'm doing IVF at the moment so I need to take it easy and this allows me to do that. Plus, I get some extra time to spend with my girlfriends."

The transition has been surprisingly easy. With her father-in-law giving her a hand with the jewellery side of things, all Sarah has needed to do is learn how to set up and run a website. With plenty of enquiries so far, she plans to open a showroom next.

"I like making people happy," she says. "We only live once so why not try as many things as you can?" →



Five signs you need a career change

- 1** You're feeling burned out. Although you once enjoyed going to work, it's now a chore to drag yourself out of bed and face your day. Once at work, you have a hard time keeping your eyes away from the clock. If you've changed employers but your feelings remain the same, it may be a sign you should switch careers.
- 2** Your job causes you too much stress. If you're feeling the strain mentally and physically, think about finding a less stressful career so you can enjoy better health.
- 3** The job outlook in your industry has worsened. If it looks like getting another job in your field is going to be more difficult in the future, it may be time to look into trying another profession that offers more opportunities.
- 4** Your job and your work bores you. No career is all excitement, all the time, but if you find your work dull, with few opportunities for advancement, it's time to seek out work more meaningful and stimulating for you.
- 5** Your personal circumstances have changed. While your career might have been a good fit for you when you first chose it, your life may have changed since then. If you've had a child, for example, you may wish to have a job that involves more flexible hours or less travel.

Continued from page 52

The easiest way to do this is on paper. Read through your CV and take a good look at the jobs you've had, then write down a list of your current skills. Decide which skills you enjoy using the most, then determine how these fit in with your values, aspirations and interests. For example, you might be a wonderful organiser and have fantastic people skills and feel you'd like to work with a charity. Perhaps a role in sponsorship management would be the right one for you.

Now you know a little more about yourself, research the options that complement your abilities and interests. Visit a careers website such as www.seek.co.nz, click on the jobs you may be interested in and take a look and the attributes and skills the employers are looking for, and the types of organisations employing in that field.

Take time to learn about the industry as a whole. The last thing you want to do is to retrain for a role only to find it obsolete in five years time. Talk to experts in the field, read the business pages and keep your eyes and ears open for news about the industry you're targeting.

Kate Ross, a director at Kinetic Recruitment, says 10% of her candidates are seeking a complete career change. "Most of the time we see mothers looking to return to

the workforce in a different, more flexible role than the one they had previously, and sometimes we see people wanting to move away from careers like nursing and teaching into a less stressful administrative position."

There may be a host of different reasons for wanting a new job, but confidence – or the lack of it – is a common thread among new candidates. "Often people don't realise they're actually capable of much more," Kate says. "[Career consultants] work with them to go through their CVs and reassess their skills, and offer courses where people can learn about some of the new technology and software packages that organisations are using, which helps make that transition much easier."

If you're looking for a new career, you'll probably have some transferable skills, but odds are some retraining will be necessary. If full-time study is not in your budget, take a look at educating yourself at home through correspondence schools like The Open Polytechnic or attending evening classes, weekend workshops or short courses. If you're transferring into a career like teaching or nursing, you may qualify for a scholarship and it's a good idea to check this out with university and polytechnic enrolment officers.

Another option, before taking the plunge, is to see if you can take some leave or reduce your hours at your current job so you can road test your new role. If you can, try volunteering, working weekends, nights or part time in your new industry to see if you like the temperature of the water before you dive in.

And remember, making the move will have costs as well as benefits, says Allison Fisher. "For some people, making a change will mean downsizing their home, cutting back on the luxuries and refocusing their lifestyle," she says.

"But in the end, you can't take those things to the grave. Sometimes it's good to ask those deathbed questions like, *What would I have liked to achieve, how have I been of value?* to get some perspective." ■

Inspirational reading

- *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It* by Barbara Sher (Hachette Livre, \$32.99)
- *I Don't Know What I Want, But I Know It's Not This: A Step-by-Step Guide to Finding Gratifying Work* by Julie Jansen (Baker & Taylor, \$23.99)
- *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* by Susan Jeffers (Random House, \$29.99)