



NOW
fire
fighter



THEN
hair
dresser

Would you change your career if you had an unexpected windfall? It's a question career coach Jenny van Workum often asks clients. "When people are thinking about their careers, I ask them what gets them up in the morning - or what they would do if they won Lotto," she says.

Career change is becoming increasingly common and acceptable, with people seeking to align their skills, values and passions to achieve happier, more satisfying lives. A variety of reasons can motivate career changes: things may be less than ideal in your current career, or it could be sparked by an unexpected event such as redundancy.

According to van Workum, the most important part of career change is gathering information.

"Doing good research strips away the mystique and fear and helps develop a self-awareness about whether the new career will fit or not," she says. "It also helps people to examine their personal circumstances: how will the new career fit with family, friends, health and financial considerations?"

FROM HAIR DRYER TO FIRE HOSE

Six foot tall, blonde and vivacious, Rachael Lind has navigated the career change from hairdresser to firefighter with considerable tact and skill.

Growing up on a Kaponga farm in the shadow of Mt Taranaki, Rachael began an apprenticeship at a Hawera salon when she was 15, worked as a hairdresser for eight years and taught hairdressing in Taranaki for a further 10 years.

"By 2003 I had two small kids and was on the hamster wheel working Monday to Friday and not feeling good about anything. I needed more flexibility and to be more useful. The Hawera Police had previously tried to recruit ►

Ever feel like doing a radically different job? We meet three women who took themselves out of their comfort zone to chase a new dream career

WORDS JOY STEPHENS PHOTOGRAPHS NICOLA EDMONDS

change

ARTISTS

me, so I thought about the emergency services.”

While home on maternity leave in 2001, she gave the New Plymouth Fire Station a call. She went out on a fire truck for a day and was sold.

“The best thing I did was to go to a Fire Service recruitment open day in Auckland and try the physical pre-entry test,” says the 40-year-old. “I failed it by one minute but realised that I’d done quite well for my first attempt. It involves tasks such as climbing ladders and dragging a 90kg dummy while carrying a weight on your back.”

After getting through the tough recruitment and training, Rachael became a member of the New Zealand Fire Service. She is the first and only woman on the fire crew at the New Plymouth Fire Station.

“For quite a long time I stayed under the radar, watched, listened and worked out the lay of the land. I love to talk and have fun, so it was difficult for me not to let that out, but I knew I had to do it. The guys didn’t want me there initially. In a different job I’d feel really hurt and angry, but this job is so awesome that you let little things go.”

A member of Blue Watch for seven and a half years, Rachael loves the camaraderie, the diverse range of work, and the fact she makes a difference. Shift work means that Rachael can be more involved with her children and community initiatives such as Look Good Feel Better, in which she volunteers her hairdressing and makeup skills to women having cancer treatment. She is also on the national management team for FAIP, a juvenile fire awareness and intervention programme.

“I took the leap and it has been so hugely successful for me. I have such a well-rounded life and can achieve all the things I want in my personal and professional life. I am so pleased that I was stubborn and stuck it out,” Rachael says.

Q&A

What was the hardest moment in your transition? I have always been strong and athletic so the physical side was not a problem. Integrating into the station was the most challenging thing.

What do you wish you had known before you did it? I’m glad I didn’t know about the culture, but if I’d known how awesome the job is, I would have done it sooner.

What has been the best thing about it? There is huge potential for growth.

What would be your advice to anyone considering a career change? Think about why you are doing it, what’s going to be involved and if it’s possible. Make sure you are changing career for the right reasons.

FROM THE OIL INDUSTRY TO THE VINEYARD

Wellington electrical engineer Jane Lenting immersed herself in various aspects of the wine industry to establish whether she should start a new career in viticulture. A refinery planner for BP, Jane worked in the oil industry for more than 20 years.

“I had a good technical role and a good employer, so there was a bit more at stake, but this idea kept coming back that I wanted to get out of the office and live a slightly different life. Loss of status wasn’t an issue for me – I wanted to get outside my comfort zone.

“I have always gardened and in about 2006, I decided I wanted to grow plants commercially.”

Jane’s late father Allan Cookson had been involved in an experimental vineyard on Christchurch’s Port Hills, so she knew what was involved in growing grapes.

Over several years, 52-year-old Jane did extramural study and took unpaid leave from BP to do wine industry work experience in Martinborough and Gisborne. Although some of the work was quite mundane and she worried about its physical demands, she liked what she saw. Reducing to four days a week at BP in 2008 was ‘like a circuit breaker’ and in 2010, Jane completed a Graduate Diploma in Viticulture and Oenology at Lincoln University.

Jane says the wine industry has become more casualised and it is likely that, like her classmates, she will have to put together a portfolio of contract work. “I have no expectation that I will send my CV off and get a staff job. I will have to door-knock and network”.

Since January Jane has worked two short contracts in the Wairarapa. “There’s a lot you can learn even from things such as leaf-plucking and fruit-thinning. By observing and talking to people, you can see that you can build up a body of knowledge over years.”

There were challenges in changing from an office environment to a vineyard and Jane believes it’s important not to be too hard on herself: “When you are older and come



THEN
refinery
planner

NOW
grape
grower

Q&A

What was the hardest moment in your transition? Leaving my job when there was no good reason to leave. And my husband Victor and I are still learning how to live in two places – Wellington and Martinborough.

What do you wish you had known before you did it? I did so much research that there have been few surprises. There has been a rationalisation

in the wine industry but I’m a great believer in its long-term future.

What has been the best thing about it? The teamwork and camaraderie, the wine and food culture around the industry, watching wine being made and the learning curve.

What would be your advice to anyone considering a career change? Work experience is so important.

Don’t just talk to people – they won’t tell you what is blindingly obvious to them but not you.

FROM CARS TO CORPORATE GUIDANCE

Aenslee Tanner was designing tyres for a German automotive systems manufacturer when she realised that problem-solving was the thing she most enjoyed about engineering, and that she wanted to apply these skills to more people-focused problems. US-born and educated, Aenslee had completed a five-year degree in polymer (plastics) engineering before working in Germany as a product developer for four years.

Aenslee, 30, decided to come to New Zealand as she had already lived and travelled throughout North America and Europe. “It was quite a big deal to change direction and a hard decision, but I wanted to find a field where I could combine analytical and interpersonal skills and solve more socially oriented problems,” she says.

While applying for jobs, Aenslee continually revised her CV and worked out how to market her transferable skills.

“I tried applying directly for policy analyst jobs and didn’t have any luck.” Deciding that she wanted to work in the public sector, Aenslee moved to Wellington in 2008 and, within two weeks of arriving, got a job with the Ministry of Education.

“I marketed myself as a person with a technical background and analytical skills and got a job as a data analyst. It wasn’t the policy job I wanted, but it was a foot in the door and I was able to get a secondment and eventually a job as a policy analyst. I was fortunate to find somebody who saw I could bring a different way of thinking to his team.”

back to learning, you forget how long it took you to learn skills and that there was a process. Not yet being competent frustrates me, but I know I have to be patient and get past it.

“I have gained some insight into the fact that change is gradual. Your identity is quite tied up in your job. It’s unrealistic to think I’ll stop thinking like an engineer and start thinking like a viticulturalist overnight. I’m still in transition. I have a plan but I don’t absolutely know where it’s going to lead. I think you have to be open-minded about what happens,” she says.

Following Dreams



THEN
tyre
designer

NOW
senior
consultant



range of public and private sector organisations who seek advice on anything from performance improvement and restructures to IT projects and audits. “I bring analytical skills – why is this process not working? How can we fill in the gaps? The interpersonal skills involve trying to navigate different organisations and discover the root causes of their problems. You talk to a lot of people and there’s a lot of detective work. It’s very hands-on and very satisfying.” **N**

After two years, Aenslee got a job with a large multinational professional services firm. “What appealed about consulting was that you work with people on issues that are important to them and you have the opportunity to assist them in finding a solution.”

She now works as a senior consultant with clients from a

Q&A

What was the hardest moment in your transition? The moments of self-doubt, especially when faced with rejection.

Did your new career meet your expectations? I found the turnaround to achieve results slower than expected, particularly in the public sector, and I initially found that frustrating.

What has been the best thing about it? I have found a better balance for me in terms of the mix of work I’m doing.

What would be your advice to anyone considering a career change? First, believe in yourself – even if you don’t have the qualifications, believe you have transferable skills and go for it. Then research to prepare yourself for the job market. Talk to people and find out what skills are required, then modify your CV, highlighting the skills that would be of most value to the employer.

10 STEPS TO NAVIGATING CAREER CHANGE

Organisations such as Careers NZ and professional career coaches such as Jenny van Workum can help you identify your values, strengths and skills. They suggest some tips to get you started.

- 1** Develop an awareness of what people are looking for, your strengths and transferable skills and how they could apply to your new career.
- 2** Talk to people about the new career, starting with your own networks, social media networks and cold-calling if necessary.
- 3** Understand what is involved in the job, day to day. Ask questions like:

What is a good day? What is a bad day? How much training is required?

- 4** Retraining can involve a drop in income and time away from families. Find out if you can study extramurally, volunteer or shadow somebody to gain new skills.
- 5** Grants and scholarships may be available for retraining. See Study Link (www.studylink.govt.nz) or the BreakOut database (available through Careers NZ or public libraries).
- 6** Be prepared to think creatively and get to the new career by a different path if necessary.

- 7** If you have changed career and are newly qualified, highlight your transferable skills to give yourself an edge when applying for jobs.
- 8** Accept that you will be entering the new profession at a lower level.
- 9** Seek advice from a career coach to help you develop a career plan with steps to help you stay positive and focused.
- 10** Careers NZ has a range of free services and resources: career guidance by phone (0800 222 733), online or face to face and information and tools on their website (www.careers.govt.nz). **N**