

Taking The Leap

They Quit Their Day Jobs To Follow Their Dreams

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Imagine leaving your job as an insurance-company lawyer to make a movie starring your wife and her favorite sports team.

Or abandoning academia after 25 years to work with former Supreme Mary Wilson.

Or exiting a managerial job with a phone company to open a music café. Or leaving a job as a corporate executive assistant and opening a framing business and art gallery.

It's that time of year when we take a pulse on our lives. Are we happy yet? If not, what could make us happier? Losing weight? Getting more exercise? Earning more money? For many of us, it may be finding a new job.

Depending on whose research you use, 20 percent to 50 percent of Americans are dissatisfied with their jobs. Careerbuilder.com says that 30 percent will look for new jobs in 2006, while 41 percent said they would leave their jobs by the end of 2007. In December 2004, about 9 percent said they would leave their jobs to start their own businesses, while 10 percent said they were changing careers altogether.

More people than you might think dream of leaving a sensible - but not particularly rewarding - job to follow a dream.

Rob Bennett of Washington, D.C., interviewed hundreds of middle-class workers for his book "Passion Saving: The Path to Plentiful Free Time and Soul-Satisfying Work." He writes in an e-mail, "I sometimes get the feeling that there is no one today who does not carry around in the back of his or her head at least one 'What if I tried?' scenario for dramatic career change."

The realities of layoffs, downsizing and outsourcing in American business life have made these possibilities seem less far-fetched. Here are the tales of some people who chose to leave seemingly sensible jobs - at least for the time-being - to pursue dreams.

Buyout Payoff

John Quarticelli of Hampton had been working for Verizon for more than 20 years, when he found himself completely disgusted with the company.

He managed 25 to 30 people and was responsible for the internal computer maintenance and trouble shooting. While in the past it seemed that working for a large company meant security, Quarticelli said, it was clear to him "that anything could happen at any moment and for any reason. It was not exactly tied into your job performance. ... Looking at my future, I could see that

in six months they could tell me I don't have a job."

Two years ago, when the company offered a buyout package to managers, he decided to take it. It wasn't a massive amount of money, said Quarticelli, but it was enough to do something he had always wanted to do. He purchased a former pizza restaurant and bar in Ashford on Route 44 with idea of turning it into a music café.

A lifelong musician, Quarticelli - who plays keyboards - liked the idea of a musical venue that wouldn't be a dance club or a bar but would offer a comfortable, sophisticated setting in which guests could listen to music and enjoy a meal.

The project has taken far longer than he expected. The café, which will be called Quartet 44, is still under renovation, and Quarticelli has been negotiating with various musical groups.

He hopes to put together programs with music ranging from jazz to classical to avant garde. "I'm looking to do the kind of thing that nobody else is doing. I'm not looking to do cover bands."

He wants song writers, composers, original music. Meanwhile, he's working a menu that includes international lines of beers and aperitifs - no hard mixed drinks - with an eclectic menu.

"It's been very difficult, pretty stressful, a lot of strain on everything: my life, my marriage. It's been a tough haul, but rewarding because every time you achieve another goal you move move closer to the final goal. But it's tough. I know why a lot of people fail."

Despite the difficulty, he's glad he left Verizon.

"Even with all the stress of this job, I know the stress is for me. It's not for some big corporation that doesn't [care] about me. If I succeed, fantastic. If I fail, it will be because I tried but I couldn't do it - not because someone said we have to save \$600,000 and you're out of here."

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