

Women's Health

Should You Re-Route Your Career Path?

You CAN find your perfect-fit job! Here's how

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Considering a career do-over? In *The Internship*, a new movie out today, Vince Vaughn and Owen Wilson land internships at Google after losing their jobs as salesmen. Hilarity ensues when the pair has to compete with the other (much younger and more tech-savvy) interns. If only real-life career changes were so entertaining...

Vaughn and Wilson were forced to go looking for out-of-the-ordinary, shake-things-up gigs because they were out of work (and because it's a Hollywood movie and all). But there's definitely something to the idea of rethinking your career path if your current one isn't satisfying you. It means taking a risk—or, well, lots of risks (see: financial uncertainty, less job security, still not being happy with your career choice). But it can also mean *major* bliss: “When people start to do work that really fulfills them, they feel good about themselves and who they are,” says Joel Garfinkle, career coach and author of *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*. “It makes an impact on their state of mind.”

The real women below took the leap—and they are way glad they did. Here's what you can learn from their stories:

“I recently resigned from my job as a VP of healthcare investments at an investment firm to pursue my real interests—one of which is personal training, both in-person and online. I was doing it on the side in the early a.m., evenings, and on the weekend while at my finance job—with approval from my former employer's Compliance department, of course—but I'd been turning away training clients because of my day job. Now I have time to help more people with their fitness needs.”

—Judy Kuan, New York City

The lesson: Make your hobby your career

Some signs that you're not doing what you love for your job? “You don't feel energized by it, it feels like *work*, there's a burden to it,” says Garfinkle. He says it sometimes might not even occur to people that the thing they love to do outside of work—like a side job or even a weekend hobby—could actually be a full-time career. Kuan saw it and went for it. “It's scary to put both feet in the water, but it can also be completely invigorating,” says Garfinkle. “Her work is now in alignment with her hobbies and interests.”

“I worked in public relations for about five years before I had this aha moment, which was: What do I really want to do for the rest of my life? I took an inward look and decided that while I love public relations—and I’m actually still doing it freelance on the side—my real passion was in the nonprofit world. I prepared myself by looking at all the positives—like the impact I’d make, the extra time I’d have with family—and the negative, which was the pay: I took about a \$20,000 pay cut while I was enrolled in graduate school. I knew I’d have to cut back, but once I made the decision to leave my job, I accepted it and embraced it. And it turned out to be better! Now my husband and I cook dinner together and stay home more often, and we rent movies or have friends over to our house instead of always going out.”

—Jenny H., Louisville, Kentucky

The lesson: Don’t make a switch based on an impulse—think it through

So you’ve worked up the courage to make a move? Now you have to plan! Give a lot of thought to how the switch could affect your lifestyle, says Garfinkle. Jenny considered both the pros and the cons of her change, as well as ways she could make it work financially. If *you* see a new career in your future, say, 18 months down the road, evaluate your finances and start saving *now*, says Garfinkle. “Know your bottom line: the minimum amount you need to make, and what changes you can make in your financial situation, what can you get rid of,” he says, “so that the sacrifice financially doesn’t become an impediment to the choice you make to leave.”

“I was working as a management consultant, but I had this desire to do something else, I wasn’t entirely sure what. I tried working for a healthcare nonprofit in Africa and then working on a startup company back in the U.S. None of those jobs felt like ‘it,’ though. It wasn’t until I started the career destination TheMuse.com in July 2011 that I really started feeling like I was in the right career.”

—Kathryn Minshew, New York City

The lesson: Not sure what you want to do? That’s OK! Start exploring.

While you don’t want to give notice at the first sign of a rough patch, you shouldn’t be afraid to try out new career options, either (particularly if you’re exploring working in something you feel passionate about). Minshew is an example of someone who tried different careers, found out what worked and what didn’t, and kept fine-tuning, says Garfinkle. “It’s better to go and (try a new job) and learn from it than sit on the sidelines and think about what it might be like,” he says. It might be the career of your dreams—or it might fizzle. But know that even if it doesn’t work out, it won’t be the end of the world. “There’s no shame in thinking you’ll love something and then figuring out that you don’t,” says Minshew. “If it turns out not to be the right fit, it’s OK to admit to yourself, ‘This isn’t what I thought it would be, so let’s see what I can learn from it, and let me start thinking about the appropriate time to make another move.’” Plenty of people have rebounded from failed career experiments and ultimately found a more fulfilling path—just like Minshew.