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*inspiring*  
WOMEN

# Career shift

If work has become a drag or a chore is it time to consider a change? We asked three women about their successful career pivots.

BY STEPHANIE OSFIELD PHOTOGRAPHY JEREMY GREIVE

*Every human has four endowments: self awareness, conscience, independent will and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom... The power to choose, to respond, to change.*

Motivation expert Stephen Covey

If you had to choose a career to suit your passions and priorities, would it be the job you're in right now? Or do you often catch yourself thinking, "I'm so over this - I don't want to do this job for the rest of my life". If your work blahs and Mondayitis last all week, you're in good company. According to job recruitment company SEEK, almost half of all Australians contemplate looking for a new job at the start of the year.

The idea that we will have one career for life is well past its use-by date. Career pivots are the new normal and at midlife they're rarely about chasing a bigger salary or high status job. "In you're in your 40s and 50s, a career change is usually about giving your life new meaning and a fulfilling job is part of the mix," says Melbourne careers counsellor, Meredith Fuller. "Career fatigue often occurs because your priorities and interests have shifted and are very different from what they were in your 20s or 30s." ▶

### TOP 10 CAREER CHANGE QUESTIONS

Flirting with the idea of a new job description? According to vocational counsellor Meredith Fuller, you should not jump career ship until you can answer the following questions:

1. Am I suffering work blahs or life blahs?
2. Could I make a living out of one of my passions?
3. What retraining will I need for my new career and how long will it take?
4. What pros and cons would my new career involve?
5. Will the change involve a pay cut?
6. Does this new career offer a range of jobs?
7. What portable skills do I have?
8. What would this new career offer that my current one doesn't?
9. Are there any hidden stresses in my new 'go-to' career?
10. Who could I approach to help mentor me through this change?

### POWERED UP ON PILATES

Swapping corporate suits for activewear was the best thing Sharon Dearden, 50, ever did.

"In 2016, I was a corporate marketing manager, working long hours and travelling every week or fortnight. I enjoyed my job but I was tired of the pressure and rushing. So when my workplace downsized I jumped at the opportunity to take a redundancy. With excitement I pursued the fitness career I'd always wanted since my 20s.

When younger I ran internationally, representing New Zealand and I studied to become a personal trainer and Pilates instructor. But injuries and the promise of better pay led me to take a corporate job instead, which I sometimes regretted. This was my chance to try that other career path. I spent six months updating my Pilates qualifications. I also started cold-calling studios. Within weeks I was teaching Pilates classes. Within six months I was earning enough to survive financially.

I used to dread the alarm but now I bounce out of bed with enthusiasm and energy on workdays. I love my job so much it feels like fun, not work. From Monday to Saturday I teach one or two studio classes plus several private clients through my business.

There are drawbacks: I have a lower salary with no holiday or sick pay. On the upside, my hours are far shorter with far less stress. I feel more relaxed and have swapped corporate suits for activewear, no make-up and a messy ponytail. I get a real buzz from motivating people to stay fit and flexible and love seeing how it boosts their mood and wellbeing. I also enjoy more quality time with my son and partner, family and friends, so those relationships feel much closer. Plus instead of squeezing exercise in after work, I get paid to stay fit!"



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### A NEW CHAPTER

**Pateenah Hordern, 53, went back to school so that she could get the career satisfaction she was craving.**

"In my 20s I left behind my job as a personal admin assistant to work in aid organisations in South East Asia. While there I met my husband and had two daughters. On returning to Australia in 1992, I also had two sons and juggled motherhood with completing a Bachelor of Arts degree. In 2000 I returned to PA work for six years – this time at a high school.

But that work no longer challenged me enough. The highlight of each day was interacting with teenagers. Slowly it dawned on me that I might enjoy retraining as a teacher. For my arts degree I had majored in English literature so all I needed was a diploma in teaching. To obtain this I studied part-time for two years while still in my PA job. And at the ripe age of 49, I graduated as a teacher. Luckily, I was able to start teaching straight away at the same school where I was a PA. My first days and weeks were incredibly nerve-racking but I just had to slow my breathing and push through it, which also made me feel really satisfied and strong.

Unlike my PA work, I now get to be creative while exploring and utilising different mediums including novels, film, YouTube videos, songs, poems and visual texts including paintings and sculpture. I have new skills in everything from classroom management to helping students critically analyse a book. Sure there can be pressure when I have lots of reports to write or essays to mark but that is balanced out by shorter work days, which I love because I have more time to exercise and cook a healthy meal. The frequent holidays are also a bonus and have allowed me to travel more. It is deeply satisfying to interact with my students and help foster their love of English and books, which are my passion. I love feeling that I'm making a difference to their lives."

### LABOUR OF LOVE

Instead of working to live you now want to live to work. So you crave a job that allows you to combine work with a passion and make money doing something you love. "For many women this means shifting to a career that is more altruistic, people-centred or creative," Fuller explains. En route you may be keen to develop new skills and explore new talents.

There are many pay-offs. Changing careers is an effective way to make-over midlife and fill it with fresh goals and challenges. When you shift careers you gain more than a new job description – you also gain a sense of mastery and achievement. The increase in personal and job satisfaction can give you a whole new lease on life. No more hitting the snooze button three times – now you want to get out of bed because you eagerly look forward to work each day. You may also start channelling that energy and enthusiasm into other health-boosting changes such as exercising more and stressing less.

For some women, a career pivot provides a welcome change of pace. After years of juggling work and family, you may have done your dash with working long hours or handling multiple responsibilities and be keen to find a job that offers more flexibility and is less of a time and energy drain. ▶

### FALL IN LOVE WITH WORK AGAIN

**Bored by your job but can't change careers? These tweaks can help you still look forward to going to work:**

- Connect with colleagues: Chat about their weekend or hobbies and boost your sense of belonging at work.
- Mentor someone: Helping a work experience student or new staff member can provide you with a new and positive focus.
- Makeover your work station: Declutter. Now redecorate by adding a pretty mouse pad, a few plants, some pictures of nature and an electric essential oil infuser.
- Suggest a walking meeting: This will give your energy an instant boost.
- Put up your hand: Ask your boss for a new challenge or talk to HR about upcoming opportunities for a job change, promotion or sideways move.
- Set yourself a challenge: Streamline a system, bring in new clients, improve your productivity, typing or research skills.
- Timeline today's goals: Enjoy the satisfaction as you tick them off.
- Maximise your lunch hour: Walk, sketch a streetscape, read a book while savouring a latte.
- Do spot meditations: Every hour focus on your breath or a soothing word like 'calm' and help your work or deadline stress melt away.

*The great courageous act that we must all do, is to have the courage to step out of our history and past so that we can live our dreams.* Oprah Winfrey

If you are contemplating career change try to stretch the boundaries a little: “Women need to shift from thinking ‘I’m not ready to do that’ to thinking ‘I want to do that and I’ll learn by doing it,’” says Sheryl Sandberg, CEO of Facebook and author of *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will To Lead*.

It’s never too late to take a new work path. So if you think you’re at a career crossroads, get clued up on courses and jobs related to your dream career. Enter the internet, which is helping women navigate change careers at any age. “It is opening the door for women to telecommute, start online businesses, study online or take new career paths that may not have been available in their 20s or 30s,” agrees Bernard Salt, social researcher and managing director of The Demographics Group.

Tempted to try a new line of work but not sure how you would make your daydream a reality? The three inspiring women here may encourage you to chart your own future course. 

### IS IT TIME TO BREAK UP WITH YOUR CAREER?

If you often experience any of the following in relation to work it could be time to consider a complete career shift:

**Presenteeism:** Most days it’s tough to even just make it through your list of work tasks because you can’t keep your mind on your job.

**Exhaustion:** Even when you’ve only been at work an hour you can barely keep your eyes open.

**Chronic boredom:** You don’t find your job interesting anymore and keep checking your watch all day long.

**Constant mistakes:** Your work performance is slipping because of apathy or lack of concentration.

**Whingeing:** When you talk to your partner or girlfriends you have nothing good to say about work.

**Apathy:** You used to go above and beyond at work. Now you’re so bored and ‘over’ your job you can’t be bothered to work overtime and have no drive to do your best or even chase a promotion.

**Fear:** Your industry has been hit hard by changes so your job is becoming an endangered species and it’s causing you chronic worry.

**Stalling:** All day you use delay tactics like making tea, chatting to colleagues and going to the bathroom to put off all your work tasks.

**The urge to call in sick:** You tell your boss you’ve got a cold or bad headache but the truth is you just can’t face going in to work. Again.

### HELPING HAND

**Studying while working full-time was tough for Karen Phillip, 58, but now she’s reaping the rewards.**

“When I left my unhappy marriage after 18 years I went to see a counsellor who helped me recover and rebuild my life. As I read more about relationships and mental health, I realised the area greatly interested me. I was tired of making money for others in corporate business, in jobs focused on logistics, systems and finance. My counselling experience led to an ‘aha’ moment when I realised that I wanted a job where I helped people.

For the next two years I completed a counselling and psychotherapy course online while still working full-time. It was incredibly challenging but so worthwhile. I then advertised my services via word of mouth and a website. I started counselling part-time from home. Within several years I had quit my corporate job and was counselling full-time from a home office.

Now, 15 years later I earn enough money so that I can set my own hours and only need to work part-time. I’ve completed a Masters and Phd and authored three self-help books and I enjoy doing media appearances on television and radio.

I see clients with all kinds of issues including low self-confidence, phobias, anxiety, grief, depression and lack of life direction. As well as offering them strategies I help them feel valued, heard and supported and I treasure that opportunity.

Relationships are my passion. It’s so rewarding to help couples who are having problems learn to listen and understand their partner and even fall back in love and decide not to separate. Every now and then I miss the corporate lifestyle and contact of being in an office, but I certainly don’t miss the stressing, rushing or very long hours.”



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