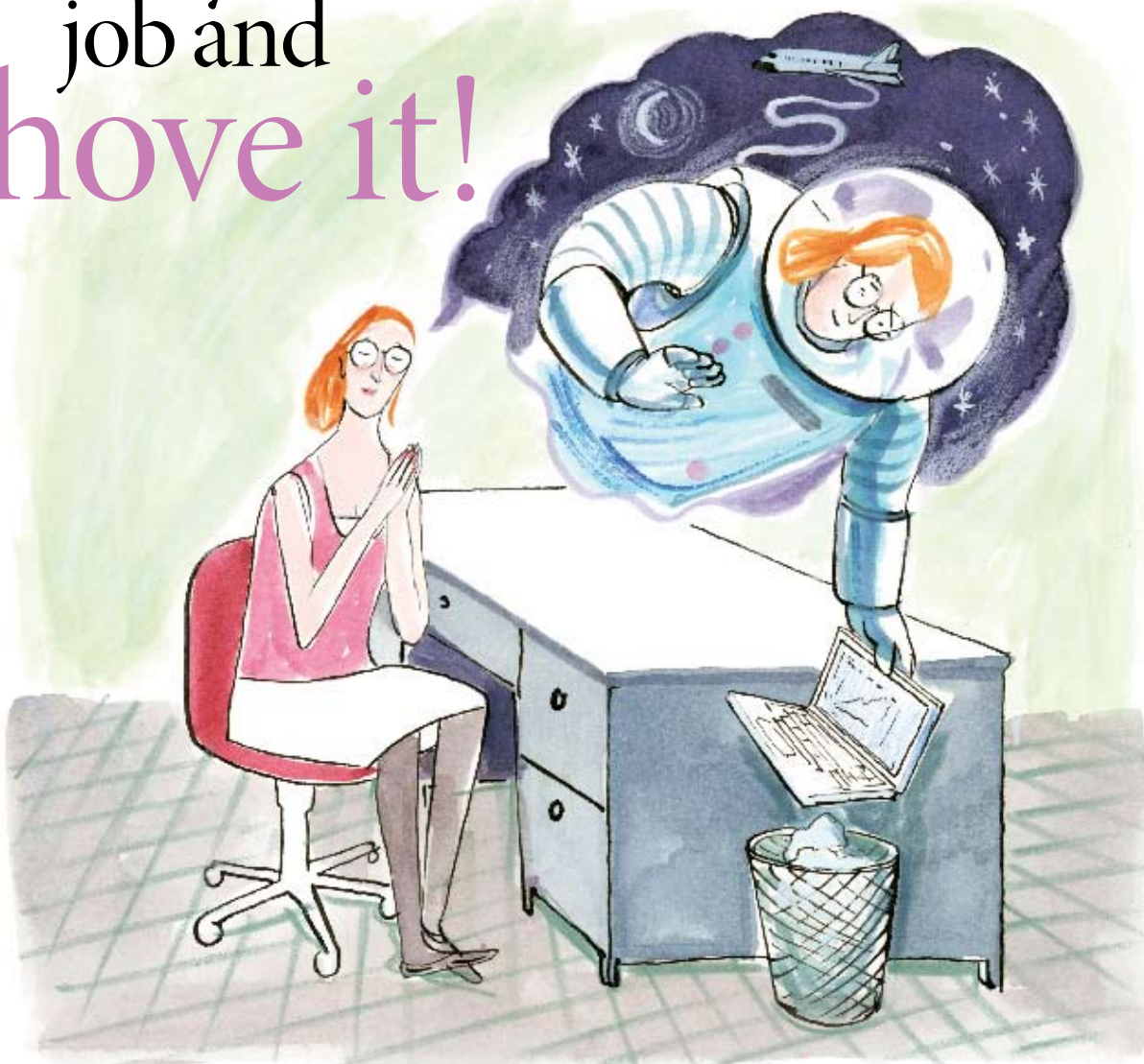


# Take your job and shove it!



It's never too late to travel down a different career path. Here's how to find one that's out of this world.

by **Cynthia Brouse**  
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**F**unny thing about fantasies. Now that I'm older, tight butts, mysterious crooked smiles and chocolate truffles have been replaced on that high-def screen inside my head by another kind of reverie, in which I either settle on one of my current three-plus careers or launch a new one altogether. One day I'm daydreaming about returning to school to study narrative therapy; the next, I'm certain I want to secure benefits and a pension in the human-resources department of a bank.

Maybe you're a career-change junkie like me, or maybe you've just heard that little voice inside your head for the first time, the one that says, "I hate this job and I want to

do something completely different!" – often precipitated by a dramatic event, like a layoff or the death of a friend or the sight of that last child loading up the U-Haul. Experts tell us we're likely to have, variously, three, or four, or seven careers in our lifetimes, and although these statistics are hard to back up, it's clear we're not the loyal company people our grandparents were.

For example, the University of Waterloo's career-services program finds former students returning to see its alumni career adviser a couple of years after graduation, but that's only the beginning. "More than 20 percent of the people who see us have been out of school for 10 years," says the >>



## Where to begin

### CAREER IQ QUIZ

Career consultant Eileen Kirton suggests starting your job soul-searching with questions like these:

**Are you a risk-taker?**

If not, are you willing to arrive at a time later on in your life when you'll wish you had been?

**Are you prepared for what others might think of your new career choice,**

especially if you've chosen to work fewer hours or take a less challenging or remunerative position?

**Do you enjoy the organizational environment in your current job, and do you like your boss?**

If those two things are good, maybe you can put up with doing something you're not crazy about, at least for now.

### PRO TOOLS

Kirton says she still recommends that old favourite self-help book *What Color Is Your Parachute?* by Richard Nelson Bolles, for career advice. Or find downloadable checklists and self-assessment tools at the University of Waterloo's Career Development eManual ([Cdm.uwaterloo.ca](http://Cdm.uwaterloo.ca)) or the federal government's Training and Careers site ([Jobsetc.ca](http://Jobsetc.ca)); plus check out the latest data on hundreds of occupational groups along with job prospects in those fields ([Jobfutures.ca](http://Jobfutures.ca)). To find your own career counsellor, start with the website for the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling ([Ceric.ca](http://Ceric.ca)) and click on "Find a Career Counsellor." This site covers all the provinces and often recommends counsellors available through local community centres. —C.B.

program's director, Kerry Mahoney. "People are re-careering and rethinking their skills, values and personal characteristics."

## Know thyself

Whenever it happens to you, you're in for some homework. Bookstores bulge with titles meant to help you switch gears at any stage of life: *Reinvent Your Career*; *Comeback Moms*; *Don't Retire, Rewire!* Today, even the post-65 years constitute a new vocation. Still, our busy lives can make it difficult not only to find the time and energy to plan our escape but even to hear that voice telling us that something is not right.

When Karen Goodale, 40, a single mom and long-time accounts-payable supervisor in Winnipeg, found herself without a job after an office relocation, she couldn't think of anything to do but return to a previous employer. After a day and a half there, she quit in despair, knowing only that she could no longer sit at a desk and juggle numbers.

Then her father sent her an ad seeking a general manager for the new GoodLife Fitness franchise opening in the city, with a note saying, "Hey, this looks like a perfect fit for you." Though she'd jealously guarded her fitness-club visits as the one thing she did for herself, it had never occurred to Goodale to seek a career in that business, and she was surprised when all of her friends agreed with her father's intuition.

"On my own with two kids, my thoughts are consumed with what everybody else needs," admits Goodale. "But if you ask me what I like and don't like, it's hard for me to answer." Luckily, she listened to her dad; today she manages a GoodLife club, makes more than twice the money and loves her life. The lesson? If you're unhappy but you can't quite hear your little voice, find some way to check in with yourself and gain perspective on what you're doing now, whether by taking a vacation, by writing in a journal or, like Goodale, by paying attention >>

to what other people observe about you. (I knew I had been right to leave one job, when, years later at a party, I ran into a former co-worker I hardly knew and she said, “Oh, I remember you. You were that really angry person.”) Maybe you’re sticking with the status quo for the wrong reasons: because you’re trying to prove something to your mother; because others will think you’re crazy if you give up your safe slot; because your house owns you instead of the other way around.

## Layoff lust

Goodale’s route to a new career was scary, but it has its merits. In fact, if the little voice is coming not from inside your head but from the manager who’s showing you the door, you may become the object of your friends’ wistful “layoff lust,” says Eileen Kirton, a career-management consultant with KWA Partners in Winnipeg. “Other people may say, ‘Are you ever lucky! You get to jump off the treadmill and chart your own direction.’”

Still, it takes guts and hard work to go off on an entirely new route, whether you jumped or were pushed. When my cousin Wendy Dunlop got downsized out of her customer-service job at a bank at age 42, she decided she wanted to bake pastries for a living. (This became apparent to her when she found herself lovingly decorating cupcakes at 3 a.m. for a workplace event. “Whatever you’re daydreaming about while you’re doing your current job,” she suggests, “is probably the path you should follow.”) She asked her employment-insurance counsellor about retraining allowances. Citing a shockingly high failure rate for EI-subsidized retraining, the counsellor insisted she pursue another position in financial services.

In turn, Dunlop, a forceful four foot 10, insisted on seeing the wom-

*“Whatever you’re daydreaming about in your current job is probably the path you should follow,” says one career-changer.*

an’s supervisor, who, oddly enough, had a sideline in homeopathic medicine and knew something about following one’s heart’s desire. He was impressed with the case Dunlop made, and agreed to fund most of the tuition for a culinary-arts program; she graduated with a special-achievement award and immediately walked into two jobs.

There are any number of positive reasons to do what it takes to find something more fulfilling, and the desire to leave a legacy and make a contribution to society is a biggie. In *We Are the New Radicals: A Manifesto for Reinventing Yourself and Saving the World*, Julia Moulden tells the stories of (mostly) boomers who have decided to return to their youthful idealism, drop their (often lucrative) workaday lives and change humankind for the better.

Though most of us aren’t going to leave our jobs to become Al Gore or invent microfinancing for developing countries or raise millions to combat HIV/AIDS, that doesn’t mean we can’t change our work to match our values. After nearly 15 years in the municipal office in Parry Sound, Ont., Rebecca Johnson realized that she wanted to express her religious faith in a more tangible way. Using her holidays and a six-month leave of absence, Johnson, 45, dipped her toe into social-justice work, supporting threatened civilians and helping to document human-rights violations at the Burnt Church First Nation in New Brunswick, and at checkpoints in Hebron, in the West Bank. >>

*Some of us only think we want a change, says career counsellor Barbara Moses, when we simply like to complain. She calls this “work-victim pornography.”*

When she returned to her job as deputy town clerk in Parry Sound, it was with a firm desire to move on; after 15 months, she found a position with the World Council of Churches coordinating violence-reduction activities in political hot spots in Israel, where she lived for nearly two years. Today Johnson is back doing what she knows best, but in her preferred sphere: She’s an administrative coordinator in the Toronto office of the Christian Peacemaker Teams, an organization that performs non-violent interventions at the request of marginalized people in conflict situations around the world.

Though she misses the on-the-ground action she experienced during her stint

in the Middle East, Johnson is grateful that she can use the skills she developed in the town office in a way that more clearly meshes with her world view, even if budgeting and support work are not always that glamorous. “There are times I feel like I would like to be in the field,” she says, “but I’m willing to look at how I can be most useful, because I believe in this work.”

## Having it all

You may not have to abandon your job to satisfy your altruism or your creative drive or your need to find that elusive work-life balance. Maybe you already have what the career guru Barbara Moses calls a “portfolio career,”

in which you combine full-time, part-time, contract and/or volunteer work to put bread on the table while tackling global warming or playing the oboe or doing whatever feeds your soul at the same time. The trick is to mix and match across the span of your life in a way that you’re not overtaxed – and you don’t feel guilty about what you’re doing, or not doing, at any given moment. As Moses says in her refreshingly unidealistic book *Dish: Midlife Women Tell the Truth About Work, Relationships and the Rest of Life*: “You can’t have it all, at least not all at the same time.”

Moses adds that some of us only think we want a career change, when we simply like to complain (she calls this “work-victim pornography”), or we believe that constantly talking about throwing it all away for something new makes us sound interesting and edgy.

Is that my problem? Am I simply a novelty-seeker who fears commitment? Maybe. I’m almost comforted by Moses’s contention that dramatic career shifts are rare. “About 80 percent of mid-life men and women who start out thinking they want a career change,” she writes, “discover it’s not the nature of their work per se that’s bothering them, it’s where or how they’re working.” Maybe a new boss, a new company, a new location or a change in attitude can be enough to help us regain that passion we lost along the way.

When I call her, Moses gives me a line I’ve heard from her before: “You don’t have to constantly be doing a Madonna.” Well, nobody’s going to mistake me for the oft-reinvented pop queen, though we’re about the same age.

But I can still fantasize. ■



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