

Want a Livelihood -- and a Life -- You Can Love?

By Valerie Young

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How to Turn Your Dream Into Reality in Five Minutes a Day and Other Tips for Time-Stressed Dreamers

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You've already made up your mind that there has to be more to life than careers, cubicles, and commuting. Yet, the prospect of making a major life change when you're already feeling caught between a "clock and a hard place," feels overwhelming.

On the off-chance you don't win the lottery, your great aunt doesn't leave you a fortune, or the Publishers Clearing House prize van doesn't surprise you as you're getting out of the shower, there's only one thing that's going to help you realize your dream of more rewarding work - YOU.

Here are five steps even the busiest person seeking a major work and life change can take to get the process rolling:

1. Turn griping time into planning time. How much time do you spend complaining about your high-stress job? Instead of dwelling on what's wrong with the current picture, use your limited time to mentally map out a new one. Visualization is most effective with your eyes closed. But, if you're really crunched for time, existing day-dream moments - while showering, commuting, waiting at the photocopier, and so on - will suffice. Devoting five minutes a day to imagining your ideal work/life and making a plan to get there will move you far closer to your goal than fifty minutes spent complaining about unrealistic deadlines or a difficult coworker. And, you'll also tap into a great source of energy you can draw on when you are ready to act.

2. Keep your goal front and center. First, set a target date for when you want your "new life" to begin. Then write it on the calendar. Besides being a great source of motivation, knowing how much time you have until "D-Day" lets you create a realistic plan for hitting it. Next, find creative ways to keep your dream literally, in your face. A computer analyst who wants to someday open a catering business reinforced her goal by programming her computer's screen saver to read, "cater to your dreams and they will come true." She also chose as her e-mail password "Nov02," her projected departure date. As you come across images or quotes that reflect your dream, place them around your workspace, in your daily planner, on the refrigerator - any place you're sure to regularly "see" your destination.

3. Buy with an eye to the future. If your dream is to escape the professional scene altogether, you probably won't need all those business suits overrunning your closet. Resolve now to make do with the work wardrobe you already have. When you do take the leap, you can donate your business attire to an organization like Dress for Success that assists people just entering the job market. Spend the money you've saved instead on things you'll need for your new career or venture - classes, buying or upgrading a home office computer, equipment, inventory, and so on.

4. Avoid the nay-seers. Other people's skepticism, like the flu, tends to be contagious. And, unless you've built up your immune system, these dream killers can knock you for a loop. A few years ago I shared with a coworker my own dream of a lifestyle where I could spend the spring and fall in the beautiful hills of Western Massachusetts, summers by the ocean on Cape Cod, and winters on a tropical island. "Yeah, right," she quipped, "how old will you be when that happens?" I, 40 at the time, estimated with some confidence that I'd be 43 or 44. My coworker laughed nervously, not quite sure whether to believe me or feel sorry for me. I knew she'd settled on pity when she patted me on the back and said, "dream on." I never spoke to her of my dream again. A year and half later, I left my full-time job.

The very next day I left for a month long stay on the Cape where I relaxed and worked on my new and - portable venture - a newsletter. I haven't entirely reached my four-season goal, but then again, I'm only 42!

5. Do what you can - but DO SOMETHING. As one Chinese proverb reminds us, moving a mountain begins by lifting one stone. To keep from being overwhelmed - yet still make headway - break your larger goal down into more manageable steps. Then, no matter how hectic your day, pledge to take at least action. Even if all you can handle on a given day is to jot down one new idea, read a single page, or make one phone call - you've still made progress. But that's not all. You're also generating the enthusiasm and momentum to take another step and another. And, before you know it, what was once the stuff of dreams, you will have made your reality.

Right livelihood consultant, Valerie Young (mailto:vyoung@changingcourse.com) is the Dreamer in Residence at <http://www.changingcourse.com/>, an on-line resource for people who want to discover their life mission and live it. Her career change tips have been cited in such publications as The Wall Street Journal, USA Today Weekend, The Guardian (London), The Edmonton Sun, The Chicago Sun Times, The Dallas Morning News, The Boston Globe, Redbook, Reader's Digest, and Entrepreneur's Business Start-Ups. She is an internationally known speaker and workshop leader. Over 20,000 have attended her program on Overcoming the Impostor Syndrome (<http://www.impostorsyndrome.com>).

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