

Whether you're a fitness instructor who dreams of being a florist, or an accountant with acting ambitions, building a job portfolio is good for your CV and your work/life balance

Words Jan Masters

My brilliant careers

Staying in one job at the same company for aeons has long been seen as a bit sad. Nowadays, we're used to maintaining career momentum by shifting companies to broaden our experience and prove we're not wimps, stuck in a comfort zone and scared to move on.

But, while a reasonable amount of job promiscuity has become an expected part of a clearly mapped-out career path, going off-road at tangents and heading into uncharted career territory has been a no-no. Sure, the odd diversion may have been tolerated (a sabbatical or spell abroad, perhaps), but once a tinker/tailor/soldier/sailor, it's been tough to jump ship and become a spy.

Until now. Because the hot new trend in the job market is to make career multiple choices – to pick 'n' mix a portfolio of professions, either by segueing into careers that are connected (like a friend of mine, who started out as a model, then trained as a make-up artist, before taking up photography and moving behind the lens), or by making more radical switches (an acquaintance ditched a PA job to join the police force). Even my favourite florist used to be something in the city. In short, what once was seen as career suicide is being viewed as a move made by the career-savvy.

Godiva Apedo, 34, is one such professional who refuses to be pigeonholed, proving it's possible

to career-switch and job-juggle big time. At one point, she was working in IT by day and dancing in *The Lion King* at the Lyceum by night!

After training at the Rambert Ballet School, I joined the Phoenix Dance Company, before freelancing as a professional dancer. But, in my twenties, I also enrolled on a part-time IT course, because I was aware of the impact technology was having on our daily lives. Despite never having thought of myself as a techie, I enjoyed it and went on to do a university degree in Information Systems Design, keeping my dancing going throughout, she explains. Now with two children, she still performs, teaches dance and takes on jobs that use her IT skills.

According to career coach Joanne Mallon, the reason we're embracing multi-careerism is largely down to our changing expectations. 'Many people now consider life too short to stay tied to a job that doesn't bring satisfaction,' she says. And Mallon should know – before coaching, she produced TV chat shows. 'Yes, making the leap can be scary, but the fact that there are more career coaches around is a reflection of this evolution. I work with a lot of women who want to be proactive about finding a fulfilling job.'

In fact, fulfilment is one of the driving forces behind a branch of multi-careerism labelled 'zenemployment' – taking up a new career that's more caring, ethical or spiritual. New research by Norwich Union shows that Britain's bosses face a rush of resignations from forty-somethings putting satisfaction before success. Almost half of those surveyed said they wanted a second, more compassionate career by the time they are 45 and would take a pay cut to do it, with 36 being the typical age they start to prepare.

'In their twenties, people tend to take fairly obvious steps, but then being in possession of a logical CV no longer seems enough,' says Ros Toynbee, who offers a career change programme (thecareercoach.co.uk). 'What triggers the re-think? Stress, burnout, even depression or simply boredom. But the good news is that deciding to enter a different field is no longer automatically seen by employers as a negative.'

According to the Norwich Union research, the areas those in search of zenemployment are most drawn to include teaching, gardening, alternative therapy, personal training and counselling. Sisters Rebecca and Clare Hopkins are prime examples of this trend, switching from corporate careers to help create a better work/life balance and 'put something back'.

Five years ago, Rebecca, now 36, left the beauty communications industry to retrain as a reflexologist. Clare, three years her junior, left behind stockbroking

and management consultancy to travel the world and study yoga. On Clare's return, the sisters felt in a position to found their new business, Balance Being (balancebeing.com), which organises bespoke events for company 'away days', client entertaining and staff parties, bringing in the pampering and uplifting services of holistic and beauty ◀

'People now consider life too short to stay tied to a job they hate'

therapists – they lay on everything, from meditation and massage to healthy cuisine and cocktails. ‘Ninety per cent of our therapists have also left the corporate world and retrained. We use them because who better to understand our clients?’ says Rebecca.

What’s more, a spin-off business has evolved, called Balance Me, an aromatherapy products range, originally created for use in their treatments, which now sell on the internet (balanceme.co.uk) and in John Lewis.

Adds Rebecca: ‘It’s hard work, but we’re growing the business organically and using the skills we learnt in our former roles. But, most importantly, our venture encompasses our passions.’

‘It’s when you fulfil your values that, generally, you’re happiest in a career,’ says

Toynbee, who suggests people identify their key ‘motivators’ – yours could be independence or altruism, status or freedom, risk-taking or security, being of service or competing.

‘These are the conscious and unconscious drivers that make work fulfilling for you. Understanding them will not only help you tailor your next career move, it can also open up options in sectors that you might not have considered, but may be a good fit with your values.’

‘Recognising your interests and passions is crucial, too,’ she continues, which is why she gives clients exercises to increase self-awareness, such as identifying six key achievements or difficulties surmounted, and analysing why they stand out as peak experiences. She also suggests remembering what you loved doing in childhood, as well as noting activities that have so absorbed you, you didn’t notice time passing.

In Caroline Kannreuther’s case, that’s always been art. No surprise, then, that her captivating oil paintings and bold abstracts are being shown by galleries, while interest in her website is growing. The surprise, however, is that she only started to study fine art full-time six years ago, age 36.

‘I’ve followed a chequered path,’ admits Caroline, who studied languages in Switzerland, before temping in Paris and becoming a tour guide in Kenya. She then went to work as a PA and then

in PR. Clearly, her artistic abilities fed into the day job. A typical day? Launching a spring cosmetics collection by turning a Covent Garden venue into a giant aquarium. And the organisational skills she honed also came in handy when she was studying at Wimbledon College of Art and needed to help raise £10,000 for the end of year show.

However, funding herself through college without the cushion of a full-time job was another thing entirely and she confesses it was daunting. So, whenever she had spare time, she took on freelance PR projects.

Malon believes keeping a finger in a former financial pie, while you dip your toes in a new pool, is one way to ease the transition cash-wise. ‘Even if you dislike your old career, when you use it to facilitate a new beginning, it starts to occupy a different space in your head,’ she says.

So, if you just want a new career is for you, you’re probably thinking about the skills you have that will point you in the right direction. Stop right there, says Toynbee: ‘Rather than think about skills you possess, narrow it down to skills you *want to transfer*.’ Just because you’re a whizz with figures, doesn’t mean you need to play the numbers game. Maybe it will simply be a bonus when you do your VAT return

for your new exotic plants nursery. And don’t confine yourself to job skills – think in terms of life skills. If you run your home like clockwork, an organisational role may be for you.

Another exercise Toynbee suggests is creating ‘a spectrum of possibilities’, ie 10 ways to bring a new career theme into your life. ‘So, say you love animals, possibility one might be donating £10 a year, possibility four, volunteering at an animal charity. Six might be working full-time for a charity, while 10 would be being a director of a worldwide fund. You may not want the pressures of possibility 10 when something in the middle can be just right.’

‘The final step is creating a master plan to turn your vision into a reality, which means looking at what it would take in terms of skills, experience, qualifications and contacts to get there. Next, look at where you are now in all those areas and write down everything that’s required to bridge that gap,’ advises Toynbee.

‘I was encouraged by my parents not just to try my best, but try different things,’ concludes Godiva. And just look at my brothers’ and sisters’ careers: teacher of autistic pupils/fashion designer, barrister/musician, journalist/vicar, scientist/poet, English teacher/film director. And anyway, who says you’re only allowed one career per life? ‘Certainly not a ballet-trained IT specialist, that’s for sure. ■’

‘Identify your interests and what makes work fulfilling for you’

ARE YOU READY TO MAKE A CAREER SWITCH?

Give YES or NO answers to the following questions

1 Would you be happy to work longer hours while you find your feet, even if your long-term goal is to work fewer hours than you do now?
 YES NO

2 Are you ready to relinquish any accumulated kudos or perks of your old career?
 YES NO

3 Are you prepared to retrain if necessary?
 YES NO

4 Would you take a cut in salary if required?
 YES NO

5 Have you visualised the day-to-day reality of your new career, rather than simply embracing the general idea?
 YES NO

6 Are you sure you’re not choosing a new career as an escape route from a situation that’s making you miserable?
 YES NO

7 Can you survive financially from the word go, even if you believe career-switching will pay off in the future?
 YES NO

8 Have you fully formulated a fallback position?
 YES NO

9 Have you blue-skyed all possible options for new careers before settling on one?
 YES NO

10 Have you spoken at length to other people who work in your chosen new career?
 YES NO

11 Have you explored ways of changing your current job so it brings you greater fulfilment and, having done so, still want to career-switch?
 YES NO

12 Will making this career change boost your self-esteem, even if it fails?
 YES NO

0-4 Yes answers: You may like the sound of a new career, but you’re nowhere near ready to make such drastic move. Analyse exactly why you say you want to change jobs and consider consulting a career coach to help you explore all the possibilities.

5-8 Yes answers: You’re dipping your toe into new waters in a way that could pay off, but you’re not ready to take the plunge. Look back at the questions to which you answered ‘No’, and, if you’re still committed, do the groundwork required to change the ‘No’s into positive responses.

9-12 Yes answers: Seems like you’re ready to fly off to horizons new. But remember, enthusiasm isn’t enough. It’s time to be meticulous as you formulate the master plan that will ensure you make the switch as seamlessly as possible. Write a list of every action you need to take and give each one a deadline. Good luck!