

Change your life

Career in a rut? Finances out of control? Struggling with weight? Need a new style? If you're yearning for change, choose now to improve your life. Four writers help you get started.

MAKE A CAREER MOVE



Donna Reeves is a Walkley Award-winning journalist whose career has shifted between states, newspapers, magazines and online. She now lives in Sydney.

CHANGING CAREERS CAN be one of the most exhilarating yet scary decisions you can make, and like any life-altering event, it needs to be planned carefully. While some people might be lucky enough to turn hobbies into thriving full-time businesses, for most, just deciding what changes to make can be overwhelming, let alone the logistics of how to go about it.

Talk to a professional

Determining what it is you want to do is crucial to managing a successful career change, because if you choose the wrong job, you could be making a costly and time-consuming mistake. If you are unsure about your next move, or have no idea what you are interested in, consider talking to a professional such as a career coach or counsellor. A career counsellor will help you examine what it is you want to get from your job, while a career coach deals with the practicalities of how to achieve it.

"When people are exploring what they want to do, they need to look at all the aspects that make them an individual," says Jenni Proctor, a coach and counsellor at her business, Career Clarity. "They have to consider things like their interests, skills, experience, passions, as well as their preference for working conditions, hours, or whether they like working in teams or on their own."

Jenni says the best place to start is by establishing what you don't like about

your current career and what it is you want to change. Once you have the negatives out of the way, focus on what you do like about your job. Then, look at what you enjoy outside of work, as this can provide vital clues as to the type of person you are, and what gives you satisfaction.

"I find that this is the 'aha' moment, when people see that all the things they've been doing just haven't been meeting any of their internal needs," says Jenni. "Once you get to understand what your internal needs are, you can start looking at what you can do that will satisfy them." When you have a clearer idea of the career that best suits you, Jenni says there are a few tips that can help ensure a successful career transition (see below).

Tips for making a successful career change

- 1 Know what you have to offer**
Recognise the transferable skills and experience you have and consider how they could benefit the occupation or company you are targeting.
- 2 Know yourself**
You will increase your chances of making a successful transition if you understand the aspects of work life you find fulfilling, the level of responsibility you thrive on, and the environmental factors that satisfy you. Create your own criteria list for your ideal work situation.
- 3 Understand the labour market**
You must know the reality of the work you are seeking – salaries, opportunities and future prospects of that occupation.
- 4 Be realistic but don't let that get in the way of your dreams**
It is important to pursue your dreams, but the dreams must be accompanied

Further study

Sometimes a new career path will require further study. This in itself can create stress, as the idea of attending university with a bunch of school-leavers can be terrifying.

"One thing I notice about women starting university is that they're really tough on themselves," says Kirsty Mitchell, employment services manager at Bond University's Career Development Centre. "They see everyone else as being really confident, whereas they're feeling very nervous and insecure. They can spend the whole time thinking, 'how do they know that', 'will I ever be able to learn all this?' and it freaks them out because they've been used to feeling confident in the working world or at home."

What's important to realise when you start campus life is that other people are facing exactly the same situation. Mature-age students are a fixture at all Australian universities in all areas of study, so even though you may feel as though you stick out like a sore thumb, no-one else will. "Older students can feel so obvious and sensitive in a university environment, but they shouldn't. They're not alone," says Kirsty.

In order to get the best out of your degree and do well, Kirsty says it's sometimes a useful strategy to enrol in one or two subjects at the beginning, rather than commit to a full-time

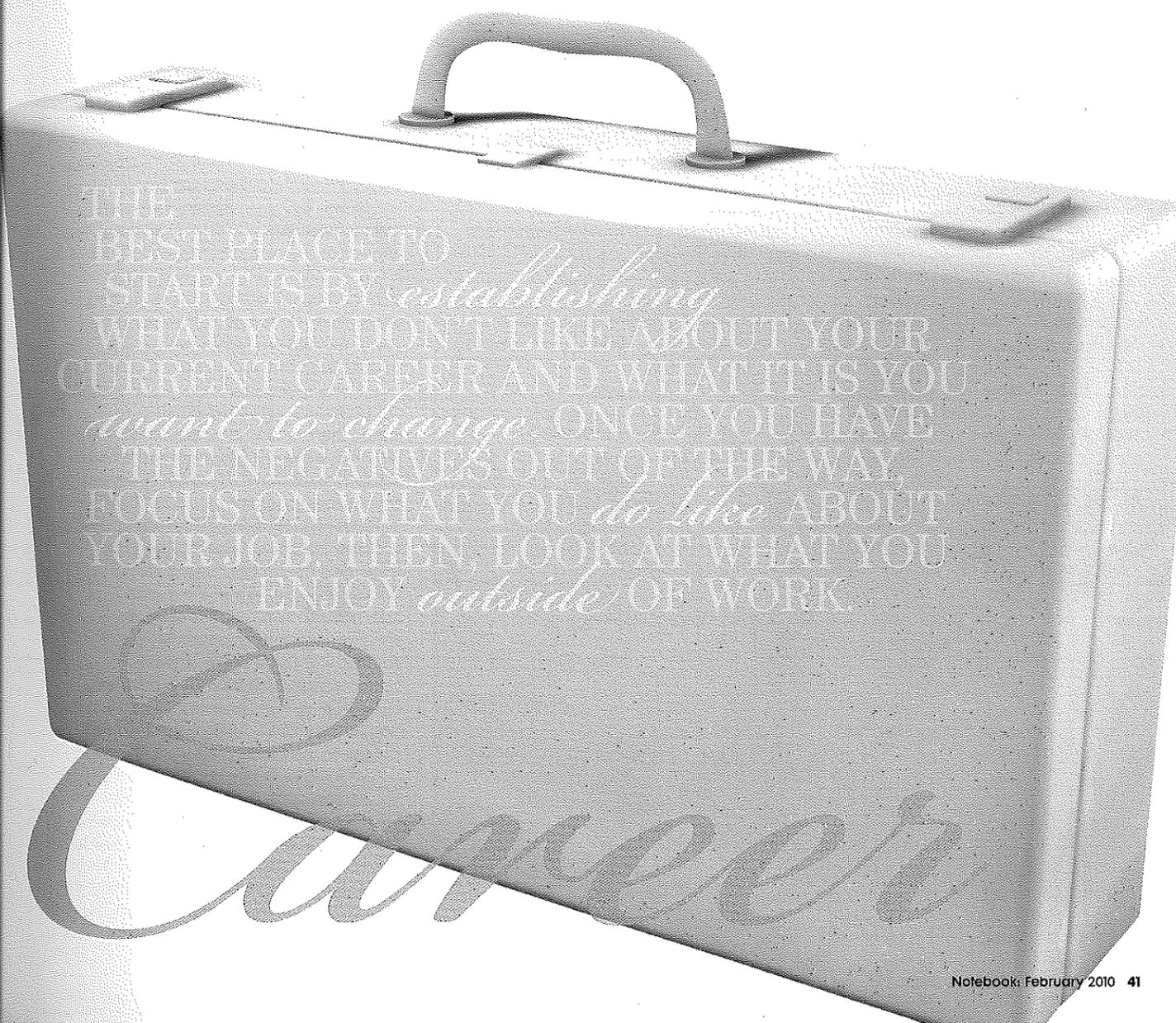
workload. This will allow you to ease into the new world of lectures, tutorials and assignments as well as integrating your study life with home and even work life. Most universities offer student services such as learning skills programs, which arm new students with study hints and strategies to complete a degree.

If the idea of studying at a university level seems daunting right now, you might consider doing a TAFE course. It can provide a gentle pathway in the world of academia.

For more information on university courses, career profiles and advice, visit www.myfuture.edu.au.

THE APPRENTICE

Did you know the Federal Government provides special allowances for mature-age workers starting an apprenticeship? There are also incentives for employers who hire older apprentices. With Australia experiencing a skills shortage in jobs ranging from pastry chefs to tree surgeons, there will be ongoing demand for skilled tradespeople. If you are considering a trade or apprenticeship and want to find out more, visit www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au.



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3 Understand the labour market

You must know the reality of the work you are seeking – salaries, opportunities and future prospects of that occupation.

4 Be realistic but don't let that get in the way of your dreams

It is important to pursue your dreams, but the dreams must be accompanied

by a reality check of your circumstances, your skills and the current labour market in your area.

5 Market yourself professionally

No matter how great you are or how much potential you have, if you don't market yourself professionally you won't get good opportunities. A well-written résumé and cover letter are essential tools for a successful career change, as is excellent personal presentation. If your career change involves creating a business, then a well-written profile and marketing documents are your essential tools.

6 Do work experience

If you are considering a dramatic career change, try to get some first-hand experience of what it involves. The reality may be different to what you think.

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