

The big career switch

A career for life is a thing of the past as more people pursue their passions. Alex Bernard talks to three people who have made the big switch successfully

I remember being rather shocked when I read that our former acid-tongued, sharply dressed Prime Minister Paul Keating once managed a rock band called The Ramrods in the 1960s. I recently spoke with international best-selling author Nicholas Sparks who, before his writing career took off, sold pharmaceuticals and Channel Nine newsreader Andrew Lofthouse was once a school teacher.

Gone are the days when people signed up to a job for life. While obviously not without risks, following your passion is a trend that's taken a firm hold and radical career changes are becoming more common.

Accountant to gynaecologist

Indeed, if changing careers were an Olympic sport, Brad Robinson, 39, would have to be in medal contention. Brad graduated from high school in Rockhampton, went on to get a degree in business and became a chartered accountant. "My high school guidance counsellor asked

me what I was interested in doing and I said 'I really like science' but I'd topped the school in accountancy; he said 'You don't want to spend your life looking down a microscope, do accountancy,' and I took his advice."

Robinson worked for KPMG Peat Marwick for two years. "I knew it wasn't for me from the first day," he recalls. So he went back to university and did a post-graduate diploma in communications and became a journalist with WIN television. "I enjoyed journalism and got to interview some amazing people but for me it was too formulaic. I need more of a challenge." He lasted 18 months.

Next, he tried federal politics, initially working for a Queensland-based senator for 18 months before becoming media advisor for then Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock. "I loved working in politics. It gave me real understanding of the world in which I lived." He held that role for two years before another passion took hold; medicine. He stayed with Ruddock as his speech writer to free up time to study.

Robinson completed his medical degree, specialising in obstetrics and gynaecology and is studying again, this time for a masters degree in fertility. "I don't have any regrets about all my career changes, it's just the way I'm wired I guess."

He doesn't rule out changing careers in the future either. "Never say never! I do love my job now, but I do sometimes think about getting involved in men's fashion."

Marketer to organiser

Kerri Rodley, 42, runs Domestic Downsizing. "I help create homes that people love, help them get organised, do interior designing and feng shui," she explains. It's a long way from studying agricultural science at Hawkesbury in NSW, where she majored in marketing. She worked for the Woolmark company for 10 years. "I worked on the Olympic uniforms, which was a highlight, but then I needed a change and moved into tourism for the next 10 years."

Married to an army officer, she was used

to packing, moving and organising houses. Rodley and her family moved constantly and were posted in the United States for three years. While she was there she discovered the world of professional organisers. "Oprah has her own professional organiser. It's a huge industry in the States and I thought 'I could do that - I do it all the time!'"

"Turning 40 was the turning point for me. It was really daunting setting up my own business. Yes, I had a marketing background and I did some great business courses, I got my interior design diploma, studied feng shui, but the learning curve has been very steep."

More than two years down the track, Rodley credits a lot of her business success to positive word of mouth and her corporate business is increasing as more people are working from home. But she admits it is very different to her previous job in government.

"You have to be motivated; you don't have a whole team to rely on."

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