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Midlife career change: Four women who made a job switch during middle age

PUBLISHED WED, MAR 21, 2012 02:00 PM
MODIFIED WED, MAR 21, 2012 02:00 PM

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Longer lives and stressed retirement funds mean that people are working well past traditional retirement age. In fact, between 1993 and 2008, the number of working women aged 65 to 69 increased from 16.1 to 26.4 percent, according to the Department of Labor. But many are also switching careers later in life in search of meaningful and sustainable work. Consider that full-time college enrollment by older women is up 31 percent in the past decade, and the number of self-employed people ages 55 to 64 grew 52 percent from 2000 to 2007, according to the Small Business Administration. Older women are not letting age stand in their way of new careers.

Here are four women who successfully reinvented themselves in middle age.

JODY JOHNSON



Hometown: Miami

Old job: Emergency room nurse

New job: Business consultant

Age when made the change: 49

Time in new career: 5 years

I loved being a nurse, and I was successful at it. I'd been promoted to manage and was responsible for training. But by the time I was 46, I had remarried and didn't want to work nights anymore, and my son was grown. I was exploring what I wanted to do next.

Over the years, I'd taken classes in communication and management, and stemming from some of those courses, I would coach people because I enjoyed it. I helped them with projects like getting married or opening a

community center. Then one of those mentees referred me to the owner of a painting business who wanted to hire me to help him grow his business.

I wasn't sure what that entailed, so I Googled "business consultant" and then did six months of due diligence before I enrolled in a certification program. It was really scary to launch a new business in middle age. It is hard to get over the inertia of being safe and warm and dry, doing what you're good at. This venture took my savings and investments. Not to mention the naysayers who told me I was out of my mind.

But the pros of starting over professionally in middle age were only possible because I had the confidence and self-knowledge that often only comes from success in another career and life experience. When you're busy taking care of your kids, a home and car, it is hard to figure out what your call in life is. What I do now is so fulfilling; I can help so many more people than I did in my former career.

ELIZABETH VENTURINI

Hometown: Cathedral City, Calif.

Old job: Marketing and program manager in the high-tech industry

New job: College admissions counselor

Age when made the change: 53

Time in new career: 2 years

I never fit in during the 18 years I spent working in the technology industry, even though I was good at what I did. I pursued it because it paid well. When I was laid off in 2008, I spent months trying to find another job. I got very, very close to landing other positions but nothing clicked. I started going through the exercise of finding what situations made me feel the most comfortable, and I realized that the industry was not for me. However, I thought about the times when I interviewed at universities, and those experiences were a breeze. There was a rapport with the other people, and I never had one butterfly. But when I interviewed at tech companies, it was very stressful.

I realized that I'm never going to be an engineer, and it is time to move on. But I worried that I'd invested so much in my career I could never do anything else.

