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Picking up change

Strong economy has more people looking to new career paths

San Francisco Business Times - by [Lorna Fernandes](#) Business Times Staff Writer

During a ski trip in Canada, Kim Segal's companions tried to fire her up.

She was listless and pensive, wondering why she was going through the motions in her life, while her animated friends seemed invigorated by their careers.

Kim's career as a certified public accountant seemed successful on the outside, but inside it left her empty. Family expectations for a career in business led the 28-year-old to crunching numbers for a living, while starving a creative side that was eager to break free.

"I had a burning feeling that this not really what I wanted to do," Segal said. "I just didn't have a passion for it anymore."

After eight years as an accountant, Segal decided to shed her skin and look for a fulfilling job.

At a job fair at the Hyatt Regency in 1998, she stopped at the booth of Joel Garfinkle, whose banner read, "Dream Job Coaching." A curious skeptic, Segal heard Garfinkle's spiel but didn't buy in.

"I was leery of paying a person to help me find myself," she said.

Finding a dream job seemed to be a Pollyanna-like fantasy for someone who couldn't even identify what the key elements of an ideal job would be.

But Segal queried Garfinkle on his process and tested his theories, and after one year of working together the former accountant discovered she is a budding journalist--someone who wants to create, articulate and convey a message.

"I would never have thought of journalism," Segal said. "But it's a perfect fit. I love to write but never took it seriously."

Segal's move from accounting to becoming a journalist is a dramatic change that is becoming more prevalent as people seek fulfillment in their careers.

Local numbers on career changes are hard to come by, but something is happening out there. Unemployment may be nonexistent and virtually every kind of job available almost for the asking, but a growing number of people are choosing this best of times as also the best one to find a new career path.

Hence the booming business for people like Garfinkle.

There are many reasons for changing careers, but the common thread is lack of job fulfillment, Garfinkle said.

A former consultant for Andersen Consulting, Garfinkle broke out on his own to find his passion and make it his career.

"Many people get trapped in well-paying jobs," Garfinkle said. "They wake up and realize that they like the paycheck but they are not satisfied."

For that reason salary is not initially part of the career search equation.

"Money is the blinder that stops you from seeing all the possibilities in life for fulfilling your career," he said.

Once ideal careers are identified, Garfinkle and his client will establish a target salary range and select which career path falls into the designated range.

With rates of \$150 an hour or \$350 a month, Garfinkle's steps to finding a dream job are a six- to nine-month process. Early exercises include identifying an activity that the client enjoys doing and identifying why it is rewarding.

"Those are the elements that you need to bring to your dream job," he said.

Like Segal, Kristi Bricker also made a dramatic switch from IT consulting to becoming a scientist.

"While I valued the (consulting) experience, I was not passionate about what I had been doing," the 30-year-old said.

After several sessions with Garfinkle, Bricker identified that her career choice even when she was very young was to become a scientist.

While continuing to work as a consultant part time, Bricker is working toward a degree in ecological biology and conducting information interviews with scientists to hone in on her career.

"I won't make as much in science but it doesn't matter," she said.

Not all clients make 180-degree turns in their career path.

For Hemant Thakkar, using Garfinkle's techniques to find the ideal job brought the realization that he was already in the career of his dreams.

An engineer by trade, Thakkar formed his own database company in 1996 but left the company two years later because his vision for the company differed from the other co-founders.

"When I left I was confused about exactly what I wanted to do," said Thakkar.

After several months under Garfinkle's tutelage, Thakkar identified that his interests lie in building and acquiring knowledge -- the ideal elements of an engineer.

"I asked myself 'Am I cut out to be an engineer?' and the answer is 'yes,'" he said.

About six months after his last formal session with Garfinkle, Thakkar is once again preparing to launch his own company -- one that will develop equipment for telecommunications companies to use as their infrastructure for accessing the Internet.

"I was pulled in many directions with many interests in addition to engineering, such as music and literature," Thakkar said. "Without stepping back, I would have been less confident and had less clarity in my decision."

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