

Pursue Your Passion

Everyone has a dream job. Isn't it time you land yours?

By Mary Beth Franklin

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John Gowdy acquired the skills for his dream job in a most unusual place: on the beach, playing in the sand with his three children. By profession, Gowdy is a fire captain in Atlantic City. By choice, he is a world-renowned sand sculptor.

After building castles at the Jersey Shore, Gowdy graduated to national and international competitions, winning contests in Canada, Italy, France and all around the U.S. Ten years ago, he launched a side business, creating custom sculptures for casinos, convention centers, water parks and weddings -- with an occasional all-expenses-paid trip to a Club Med in the Caribbean. The tools of his trade include several tons of sand (and dump trucks to transport it), shovels, masonry equipment, cake-decorating utensils and palette knives.

Gowdy's most memorable job was a White House commission that sent him to the beaches of Normandy last year to create a sand-sculpture memorial with artists from other Allied nations for the 60th anniversary of D-Day. Gowdy built life-size replicas of soldiers in a landing craft, plus a solitary infantryman crawling on the beach, with his rifle pointed forward. As waves slowly eroded the soldier, some spectators wept -- the kind of crowd reaction that Gowdy treasures. "Mine is a mixture of fine art and performance art," he says.

Sometimes he has more work than he can handle, and sometimes none at all. "Financially, I'm not setting the world on fire," he admits. But the extra income -- which occasionally approaches his \$80,000 annual firefighter's salary -- helped send his three children to college. Now eligible for retirement and a pension, Gowdy, 48, is considering turning his full attention to the sand-sculpture business, which he believes will become more lucrative once he can devote more time and energy to it.

While Gowdy stumbled into his dream job, Susan McCabe spent five years planning every step of her exit strategy from a corporate marketing position. "As good as the job was, I knew I wasn't following my true passion," says McCabe, 40, who lives in Carlsbad, Cal.

McCabe combined her love of cooking and her sales background to come up with a job that filled what she saw as an unmet need: preparing nutritious, home-cooked meals for people too busy to do it themselves -- "like I used to be," she says. She traveled extensively for her former job managing a national sales team, so she put her long hours on airplanes to good use, reading cookbooks and creating menus.

McCabe also focused on financing her business. Before she left her old job, she learned that if she rolled her retirement savings into an individual 401(k) plan, rather than an IRA, she could borrow up to \$50,000 to bank-roll the new venture.

McCabe launched her [Daily Dish](#) personal-chef service in 2004. She charges \$450 to \$500 to shop and prepare 20 individual meals at a time in a client's kitchen -- enough to serve a family of four for a week, a couple for two weeks or an individual for about three weeks. She has already matched her six-figure

corporate salary, and she's fully booked and looking to expand by hiring others who share her passion.

No obstacles

There's no secret to landing your ideal job. "Find something you like to do and figure out how to make money doing it," says Valerie Young, who runs [ChangingCourse.com](http://www.changingcourse.com), a career-counseling service. But for most people that's easier said than done. In a survey conducted by CareerBuilder.com, nearly three-fourths of those interviewed said they aren't working in their dream job because of financial responsibilities, lack of education or fear of the unknown.

Those don't have to be insurmountable obstacles. After Young left her job with a Fortune 500 company to start her business, her salary was cut in half. Now she has multiple income streams. Not only does she charge clients \$160 for a 90-minute telephone consultation, but she also does public speaking, leads corporate seminars and sells motivational books and tapes.

And there are other ways to turn your dream into a reality. If you're fortunate enough to know exactly what you want to do, it's a question of staying focused and building a network.

From the moment Bonnie Arnold landed her first job out of college with a Boston TV station, she knew she wanted to work in the entertainment industry. Arnold, 49, worked behind the scenes on small films in her native Atlanta and later moved to Hollywood.

Her big break came when she took a pay cut to work on a low-budget film in Mexico starring Kevin Costner. The money wasn't much, but the contacts she made were priceless. They led Arnold to a position as associate producer for Costner's film *Dances With Wolves*, and eventually to a plum assignment as producer of the computer-animated megahit *Toy Story*. She's currently producing *Over the Hedge*, a new animated film from DreamWorks, scheduled to be released next year. "Sometimes I see a little kid walking through an airport with a Woody doll [the cowboy doll in *Toy Story*, played by Tom Hanks] and I realize I've had an impact on an entire generation," says Arnold.

At age 23, Lisa Pagano is already on the path to her dream career. A sports fanatic, Pagano wanted to be part of the scene when Major League Baseball returned to Washington, D.C. She put the word out to everyone she knew, and a friend of a friend got her an interview with the Nationals, which had received more than 2,000 résumés.

Thanks to her networking -- and her background working in George Washington University's athletic department while she was in college there -- Pagano landed an entry-level job in the communications department with a starting salary in the high \$30s. "This is the greatest thing ever," says Pagano. But she has much bigger dreams: One day she'd like to be the general manager of a major-league team.

Seize an opportunity

Not everyone knows right off the bat where they'd like their career path to lead. Often inspiration comes later in life, and sometimes when it's least expected.

Gerry Beauchamp was an executive in human resources for John Hancock, in Boston, when the company went public in 2000 and downsized in 2002. Seeing the writing on the wall, he took an early-retirement buyout at age 53. His severance package included outplacement services with [New Directions](http://www.newdirections.com) which helps top-level executives who are looking to change careers.

Beauchamp wanted to do something that was closer to home and more rewarding. An avid runner who has completed 27 marathons, he traded business suits and a 60-mile round-trip commute for gym shorts and a two-mile run to the Ipswich, Mass., YMCA, where he became executive director. New Directions showed him how he could move from the corporate to the nonprofit world and verified that he could afford to make the switch.

His new salary was less than half of his previous one, but with two children in college and their education paid for, his expenses were fewer, too. To supplement his income, Beauchamp took his John Hancock pension in a lump sum and invested his assets. "This is a wonderful chance to live and work in my community and spend more time with my kids," says Beauchamp. And it doesn't hurt that after three years at the Y, he has brought a money-losing operation back to near break-even status.

Take a trial run

If you haven't pegged what your dream job is, research a subject that interests you. Take a class, shadow a mentor or work part-time in a new field, advises Jeri Sedlar, co-author of *Don't Retire, Rewire!* (Alpha Books, \$18.95). You can even try out a job to see if you like it. [Vocation Vacations](#), in Portland, Ore., lets you spend anywhere from a few days up to a week with a career mentor. These mini working vacations cost \$350 to \$1,200 (excluding travel arrangements).

Vocation Vacations is the brainchild of Brian Kurth, a former dot-com executive who came up with the idea while stuck in traffic on his way to work. You can sample more than 70 occupations, including vintner, brew master, inn-keeper, tour operator and TV producer, to name a few. There's even a selection of jobs in England: pub owner, chocolatier and floral designer.

One of Kurth's clients is Kevin Guthrie, 50, of Northport, N.Y., who wanted a change after 18 years of working for a nonprofit organization. Guthrie thought he might like to be his own boss, but he didn't know anything about running a small business. With no family obligations, Guthrie figured he could use his tax refund and tap into his savings for about six months as he pondered what to do next. Last April he headed to Los Angeles for a stint with the owners of Vineyard Express, a retail wine store.

After two intensive days that cost him \$500, Guthrie ultimately decided against going into retail sales. But, encouraged to go out on his own, he took a real estate course and recently landed his first listing.

FIVE WAYS TO GET STARTED

Give Yourself a Push

Tiffany Mock was miserable in her job as a senior manager for Oracle business software, so she took a class at her local career center in San Francisco. There she met Joel Garfinkle, founder of Dream Job Coaching. Over the course of eight months, Mock, 38, paid Garfinkle about \$5,000 for advice on plotting a new career course. He helped her decide to leave her job and use a home-equity loan on her condo to finance her expenses while she figured out what to do.

Together Mock and Garfinkle identified her talents for organization, problem-solving and empathy. Garfinkle suggested a career as a professional organizer and put Mock in touch with pros in that field. Three years later, Mock earns more than \$100,000 a year, thanks mainly to word-of-mouth referrals and a timely article about professional organizers in a local magazine.

You can find a career coach through the [International Coach Federation](#) or [Coach U](#). Coaches typically charge \$50 to \$200 an hour. But there's plenty you can do on your own at no cost.

Immerse yourself. Learn everything you can about your dream job. Join associations, talk to people who work in your chosen field, and volunteer.

Make a plan. When Dilbert creator Scott Adams was still toiling in the cube farm, he got up early in the morning to draw cartoons before he went to work. Once he had 50 samples in hand, he mailed them off to various syndicates. United Features offered him a contract within weeks.

Be creative. Figure out ways to turn your passion into profit. Rich Wagner started out as a freelance photographer in college and continued to pursue photography as a hobby during his 20-year career in retailing. Eventually, he opened a custom-framing shop and fine-art gallery in Simsbury, Conn., and his own photographs hang in collections worldwide.

Face your fears. Once you determine what has been holding you back -- whether it's lack of training or worries about money -- you can devise strategies to overcome the obstacle, such as going back to school or tapping your savings to launch a new career. To get a sense of how much you can expect to make in your new field, check out the "Salary Wizard" search engine at www.salary.com.

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