

Heart centred

Do you ever feel
that the job you've chosen,
the life you inhabit, isn't right
for you any more? What's
needed, says counsellor
Heather Carpenter, is
to find a new career
— a path with
a heart.



To have a path of knowledge, a path with a heart, makes for a joyful journey, and is the only way to live." This lovely quote from American writer Carlos Castenada spoke to me when I was in the midst of the agonizing thoughts that often accompany a career transition. And I became intrigued with the idea of a "path with a heart" and what it means.

When you are making changes in your life, what seems to happen is that you

meet up with and attract people contemplating or involved in the same kind of change. And the trend which is gathering momentum at the moment might be called "moving out and moving on".

Managers, executives, successful business and media people, teachers, nurses, often (but not only) women and often highly successful people, are re-thinking the drive to success. They are leaving workplaces hardened by frenetic pace, market values and alien philosophies and

looking for a new path. It is a change not driven by forced circumstances, downsizing or redundancies, but a change driven by the heart.

The search is explained in a number of ways. For some, it may be the need to re-examine life priorities, to find experiences that allow growth and reflection. Some may realise they want more time for family rather than the hell-bent rush to keep up with the demands of their current fast-lane career with all its obligations and social

visibility. Others may be disillusioned with current environments.

For some it is a migration from organisational careers. It's not uncommon for employees to find that when they reach sight of the top, they're entering an arena of power and politics that is harsh, hostile and unattractive.

Surviving is difficult and stressful, creativity disappears and the tactics required to survive often interfere with health and inner harmony. An eventual conflict of values may leave the position untenable or it may be simply a question of, "I don't want to deal with all that anymore. I need to rearrange my life to make the things that matter to me the centre of my life – and survive".

For others in jobs chosen early as a vocation for life (and this includes many teachers and medical workers), the motivation with which they entered these careers has suffered damage. Sometimes it's simply the passage of time that takes the gloss of what once seemed an alluring career. Others may feel their jobs have been adversely affected by political experiments or some of the more negative aspects of the free market.

They see their commitment hampered by bureaucratic demands and funding policies. They feel the environment is changing around them in ways that don't serve the interests of their clients.

Or it may simply be time for renewal, a need for a resurgence of energy in a direction that is fresh, vital... and often dramatically different.

The urge to change may come from a crisis which opens the eyes and wakens the mind, a declining in health and motivation, the lost feelings of the traditional mid-life crisis experience, something you read that speaks to you, or a clear glint of the light which one day says, "It's time to move". Suddenly, for whatever reason, the usual excuses for deferring change lose their power.

After people have made that leap, they're in a state of excitement – delighted at freeing themselves from past dissatisfaction, or maybe slightly stunned at their own courage.

They are happy, but transitional, and not entirely sure what the future might bring. Some allow themselves a few months to find the next path and plan their economic survival accordingly. For others a brave new venture is taken on with lashings of spontaneity.

All report great interest from friends

Exploring this new territory is all about finding where your energy and passion lie

and colleagues, many of whom confess that they, too, would like to go down the same path sometime... maybe.

It seems the path is being trod everywhere in the western world. The American experience has been documented by author Gail Sheehy in her new work, *New Passages, Mapping Your Life Across Time* (HarperCollins). I'm glad Sheehy has turned up again, just when I need her.

Ten years ago when I was in the middle of a 30s transition in life and career, Gail Sheehy's major work, *Passages*, provided me and thousands of others with a strong affirmation of our choices and an understanding of our lives. She has returned again with a redefinition of life stages, and in particular the progress of the mid-life generation of baby boomers.

The book makes the point that the changes we make as we proceed into what she call Second Adulthood, some time in the 40s, should be powerful enough to sustain us through the next decades. We who can expect to live productively to 80 and beyond will not live in a world where we can – or would choose to – gracefully decline after 55, mark time until retirement, and pick up a few hobbies.

The forward guard of baby boomers are anticipating 30 more years of new ventures and new experiences.

Whether it is going off to the country and planting a vineyard, establishing a new bagel business, or seeking simple new projects that more fully allow who we are, new careers are happening and bringing a new lease of life and energy.

This is the group that "feels 10 years younger", is big on personal power, is still wearing jeans, and absolutely refuses to see themselves as middle-aged – all reasons why our journeys differ from the generations that came before us. Other reasons, of course, are the dramatic changes in technology and biology in the world we are part of.

The years between 45 and 55, according to Sheehy, are a bonus new stage, truly new territory. Interestingly, Sheehy says

Second Adulthood is a career choice. You make the decision to explore this new territory... or not. And the exploration is all about finding where your energy and passion lie, about re-connecting with your spiritual self, and then starting over, understanding that you can do it all again before you reach 65!

So what is a path with a heart? The words may speak differently to all of us. But in essence it is the path where the integrated self is able to act, where your enthusiasms, your talents and your energy are all focussed in the same direction, and your work and your life are in harmony.

This harmony is the source of huge energy – the energy we find when we are doing what we want. It is worth finding.

• *New Passages: Mapping Your Life Across Time* (\$24.95) is currently hard to find in New Zealand bookshops, but Collins Publishers are expecting new supplies to arrive in June.

♥ The Garden Path

So keen was Lyndell Shannon to follow her heart that she overcame a life-long fear and learned how to drive!

Two years ago, the Wellingtonian abandoned a successful career as a designer with swimwear giant Jantzen to set up her own garden design business.

These days, she has to pinch herself to make sure she's not dreaming. "I'm happier than I've ever been. The last two years have probably been the most nerve-racking of my life – but having the courage to follow such a steep learning curve has been incredibly stimulating."

In an industry known for its high failure rate, 46-year-old Lyndell is a notable exception. She got a job straight out of Wellington Polytech's Fashion Design course and has spent most of her life creating stunning fashions from bright Lycra and cotton.

"I always knew I'd end up with some kind of design career. Even when I was a boarder at Wanganui Girls' College, I was always being scolded for sketching designs in my Latin textbook!"

The three-times Benson and Hedges Awards finalist loved her job – particularly