

Career Winners Who Switched Professions

By Brad Dunn

Parade Magazine - 9-6-09 - In today's job market, you need to be resourceful and flexible. Maybe it's time to switch professions—or cities. We met 12 people who took a leap and are happier now. Their stories might just inspire you to make a change, too.

Latrice Hartman, 25

Then: Souvenir Shop Manager \$14,000

Now: ESL Teacher \$32,000

Just before the recession hit, Hartman lost her job as a shop manager in Arkansas.

“I needed a new path,” she says. Fluent in Spanish, she decided to become an English as a Second Language teacher (ESL) and took courses to earn her credentials.

When Hartman heard her school district was creating an ESL position, she applied for the job and went to the interview with specific ideas. “They liked my energy and enthusiasm,” she says. Now she's teaching ESL full-time, and she reports, “I've finally found my calling.”

David Ellien, 38

Then: Architect \$92,000

Now: Landscape designer \$68,000

During his 15 years designing homes and buildings, Los Angeles native Ellien daydreamed about another career as a landscape designer. When the real estate market collapsed, he says, “The downturn actually made me free to pursue that dream.” He found his first jobs through family and friends. “I wasn't thinking about making money.”

But even though the projects didn't pay much, they led to referrals. Creating a website for his business also helped enormously. “I've gotten jobs in New Mexico and New York. It's incredible what doors the Internet can open.”

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Mallie Clark, 44

Then: Adjunct professor \$8,000
Now: Piano bar performer \$50,000

Although Clark loves music, she didn't love being a music professor in Florida: "You work your tail off for no money." She wanted to stay in the same field but make a higher salary. She'd performed at a piano bar years ago, so she called an ex-colleague for advice. Now a manager, he offered her a temporary job at his chain's Kansas City bar.

Clark traveled 1,000 miles to take it and rediscovered the joy of playing to a crowd. She says, "I can get 300 people to sing their hearts out." She did so well that her employer offered her a job in Arizona. "If I hadn't taken the temp spot, I wouldn't have gotten the offer," she says. "You have to take risks."

Terrilyn Quick, 61

Then: Flight attendant \$28,000
Now: Substitute teacher \$23,400

For eight great years, Quick worked as a flight attendant, a job she'd dreamed about since childhood. She adored the travel and the people she met, but she was let go in the recession. "It broke my heart," she says. A former teacher, she realized that her best employment option was to go back to the blackboard. She enrolled in classes to renew her teaching credentials and sent out résumés to school districts. Since the airline has said that it may re-hire her within five years, she has taken only substitute-teaching jobs. Quick, who lives in Nebraska, misses being a flight attendant but says, "My real goal in life is to brighten other people's days. It doesn't matter if I'm flying or teaching."

Charles Ware, 35

Then: Personal trainer and teacher \$42,000
Now: President of fitness institute \$65,000

A couple of years ago, Missouri resident Ware held two jobs: teaching at a school for personal trainers and running a personal-training business. As the economy softened, both jobs took up more and more time. He says, "Instead of doing several things adequately, I needed to do one thing well."
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Ware told his managers at the school he wanted more responsibility, and they offered him a higher position at a Las Vegas branch. He was nervous about the move, but he ultimately accepted the job and is happy with the decision. He says, "Closing my business was bittersweet. But putting everything into one career was the best thing I could have done."

Danny Kofke

Then: Flooring Salesperson \$35,000
Now: Special Education Teacher \$40,033

After six years of teaching, Kofke decided to take a higher paying job as a flooring salesman. "I had the chance to double/triple my teaching salary so I took this job," he says. But after a few months on the job, Kofke began to have second thoughts. "I realized my heart was not in it and I missed being in the classroom," he says.

So the Kofke family decided to move from Florida to Georgia where the cost of living was lower so he could remain a teacher.

Barbara Ferguson

Then: Revenue Agent \$35,701
Now: HR Financial Analyst \$39,371

After receiving an intriguing job offer as a financial analyst in Illinois, Ferguson decided to change jobs and relocate for the position and higher salary.

Toby Acosta

Then: Registered Nurse \$70,000
Now: Registered Nurse \$80,000

After realizing that he wanted to live closer to family, Acosta made the decision to move from Birmingham to New Orleans. Fortunately, he was able to find a similar position with an even higher salary.

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Sara Koch

Then: Advertising Account Executive, \$40,000

Now: Marketing and Events Manager, \$35,000

In 2008, Koch left the big city of Chicago for Youngstown, Ohio, in order to be closer to family and friends. But the move involved more than just adjusting to life in a smaller town. Koch switched up her career and took a lower-paying job in order to spend more time with the people she cares most about.

Sean Roy & Dave Baumgart

Then: International Reservations Agent, \$27,000

Now: International Reservations Agent, \$40,000

After their airline closed its call center in the Washington, D.C. area, Roy and Baumgart were faced with a choice: relocate or lose their jobs. The couple agreed that the benefits of sticking with the company (fully subsidized health insurance, free flights) far outweighed the risks of searching for work in their area. "We had friends who had chosen to furlough when the LAX call center closed and they didn't find jobs for 2 years," they say. "We didn't want to face that opposition."

Laura Dinapolis

Then: Customer Service Representative, \$17/hour

Now: Administrative Assistant, \$28,080

Tired of her two to three hour daily commute, Dinapolis left her customer service job in Baton Rouge to find work closer to home. But finding employment locally involved a bit of compromise when it came down to pay. "Now it takes me 15 minutes usually to get work," she says. "I lost some good benefits and about \$5.00 per hour in pay, but so far the trade off seems worth it."

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Mike Davis, 42

Then: UNIX Programmer, \$97,500

Now: Systems Analyst, \$107,500

Mike Davis was programming electronics in the automotive industry when the recession hit Michigan. The father of three was devastated when he was downsized. “I felt like a total failure,” he says. “I didn’t know how I was going to provide for my family.”

He opened up his search to the entire United States and applied for every opening that matched his background. “I just kept thinking, ‘You have to believe in yourself.’”

Mike was offered a position in Tucson, Arizona and for more money than his former job.

“I moved somewhere I’d never been before and said goodbye to many old friends and family. It was a huge plunge,” he says. “I feel lucky to have found the work I did, but it’s not easy starting over from scratch.”

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