

Stay the Course

What did you study at university?

What did you want to be as a child?

Take a Risk

Which job would you choose today if the sky was the limit?

ROAD TO A NEW CAREER

By Monica Pitrelli
Photography by
Lyan Bernales

As we grow older, we change. The career path you chose in the past may not resonate with you today. If you're yearning to branch out and try something new, be inspired by these five expats who have reinvented their careers – to pursue a business idea, to accommodate children and overseas moves, and to follow their dreams.

Julie Slack, US

Childhood aspiration: My dream was always to be a professional actor.

University major: History

Former career: Marketing specialist for National Football League and Lincoln Financial Group

Favourite part of the job? The travel – I went all over the US and to Sydney, Australia.

Worst part of the job? It never felt right for me. After college, everyone was going into investment banking or law, so I took a corporate job too because I thought it was what I was supposed to do.

What prompted your career switch? Mark Wahlberg! He started working out in my teeny, tiny gym in Philadelphia. I started talking to him in the mornings and found out he was filming a movie and training for *The Fighter*. I did some research and discovered that many movies were filmed in the area. So, I started taking classes, auditioning and getting work. That led to a lot of “doctor’s appointments” from my job. After it became too complicated to juggle both, I decided to go with acting full-time.

New career: Actor

How did you get into this field? I’ve been singing since the time that I could talk! My parents always took us to the theatre. As soon as I saw people on stage, I knew that I wanted to be up there. I started in musical theatre when I was eight years old. In college, I did improv comedy, which is totally different.

Was the shift a difficult one? No, it was incredibly easy for me. Because of my business experience, I treat my job like a business. If I don’t get a part, I’m disappointed but I don’t feel personally rejected. This has given me so much confidence walking into an audition. I don’t live and die by my next role.

Most fulfilling part? I am finally doing work that I really enjoy. It feels like a natural fit.

Miss anything about your old job? I really don’t! At times, I miss going into an office in the mornings, but that is really rare.

The verdict: old or new career? New!

“My dream was always to be a professional actor.”

Yumi Sarrita, Indonesia

Childhood aspiration: A designer for Chanel fashion house

University majors: Business and Fashion Design

Former career: Hotelier

Favourite part of the job? I worked for prestigious hotels and resorts in Jakarta, Bali, London, Tahiti and Australia. My most memorable experience was working for a hotel that was voted the “World’s Most Luxurious Resort” by *Condé Nast Traveller*, where I got to meet so many amazing and inspiring people, such as Ronald and Nancy Reagan, Princess Diana and actors Nathan Lane and Lindsay Wagner. I even organised Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall’s wedding.

Worst part of the job? Incredibly long hours.

What prompted your career switch? I decided to completely leave the hotel industry when I gave birth to my only daughter, who is now 19 years old.

New career: Fashion designer and high fashion stylist

How did you get into this field? I wanted to materialise my dream. My degree is in business and fashion design, so I went back to my roots. Now, I think I am on the right path.

Was the shift a difficult one? Not at all. I started making ball gowns and prom dresses for fun and got brilliant compliments. Then I thought, why not pursue it seriously.

Most fulfilling part? I love to meet lovely ladies and give them fashion suggestions. Most of all, I like to see the smile on their faces when they try on dresses that I created just for them.

The verdict: old or new career? The new one! As a hotelier, I had to commit all of my time to the hotel. That meant no Christmas and no New Year holidays. My daughter studies in London, and my life is split between Singapore and London now. I really enjoy designing dream dresses and being surrounded by luxurious fabrics. I think I will stick with fashion design.

“I started making ball gowns and prom dresses for fun ...”

Kristen Graff, US

Childhood aspiration: Rock star! I used to perform for visitors and neighbours.

University major: International Relations and Economics

Former career: Director of Retail Development for Giorgio Armani USA

Favourite part of the job? It was fast paced, and I travelled frequently within the US and to Italy. I started to sort out my favourite places to eat in a variety of cities. It was a precursor to expat life.

Worst part of the job? Very demanding and lots of hours – I was always on call for, pardon the cliché, fashion emergencies.

What prompted your career switch? I had my first baby, and I quickly realised I was not going to be able to keep up the pace. A couple months later I got pregnant again, and it really became unrealistic.

New career: Owner of Manners in Mind, a company that teaches etiquette and provides service training to individuals, kids, corporations, social groups and helpers

How did you get into this field? One day, I was flipping through a workbook that my husband had received at work, and I was thinking about how important good social and service skills are. I realised there are not a lot of places to learn these types of skills in a fun and socially relevant way. From there, I did research and became a certified etiquette trainer from the Emily Post Institute.

Was the shift a difficult one? Having my own business is a lot of work. There are days I wish I could just call the IT department. You have to do a little of everything in order to keep the business moving ahead.

Most fulfilling part? It is so rewarding to hear back from people who have attended my classes. A gentleman I worked with on Chinese Dining Etiquette is convinced the class helped him seal an important deal. The kids are very engaged, too – at first they think they are being punished, but they always leave surprised that they had fun and learned a few things.

Miss anything about your old job? The clothes! My clothing allowance and employee discount were great perks.

The verdict: old or new career? Right now, I'm very happy. I continue to learn and be challenged. The business is growing, and I'm able to spend time with my young children. You never know, but perhaps being the CEO of Manners in Mind worldwide operations is my future.



“ It is so rewarding to hear back from people who have attended my classes. ”

Natalie Bastow, Canada

Childhood aspiration: My fourth grade music teacher was absolutely wonderful, and I wanted to teach music just like her.

University major: Music and Education

Former career: Middle school music teacher (and occasional health instructor, earning her the nickname “the sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll teacher”!)

Favourite part of the job? The kids. There’s nothing better than playing with kids all day and watching the light bulb turn on when they discover something new or share an idea they created.

Worst part of the job? Paperwork and meetings.

What prompted your career switch? I didn’t want a full-time job after we moved to Singapore, so I started volunteering and substitute teaching at SAS. That gave me time to explore other interests.

New career: President of Caring for Cambodia

How did you get into this field? I got involved not long after I toured two schools in Siem Reap. I found out that CFC focused on education, teacher training and helping children who needed it – and I was hooked! I started on the Education Committee working with ladies who were also teachers in their former lives, and then I served as the first volunteer coordinator. Eventually, I was asked to take on the role of president for the Asia region, which was certainly not on my list of expected experiences!

Was the shift a difficult one? Not really, because this job still speaks to my passion – education.

Most fulfilling part? I love the fact that I am associated with positive change in the world. And I love the people I work with every day. CFC volunteers and supporters are very special. Their experience in marketing, teaching, business, health, finance, technology, law, engineering and more are woven together to make up this amazing organisation – talk about reinvention!

The verdict: old or new career? I really can’t say. I am a teacher at heart and will always do something that supports education. Without a doubt, I’ve been changed by my experience with CFC, and I am not sure where that will take me when the time comes to leave Singapore. I know I will always be involved with CFC in some way, though. I believe that the best life is the one that surprises you, and this change of paths has been a wonderful surprise.

“ I found out that CFC focused on education, teacher training and helping children who needed it – and I was hooked! ”

Joe Halstead, UK

Childhood aspiration: Fighter pilot, computer programmer or scientist

University major: Natural Sciences – Pharmacology

Former career: Proprietary trader at a Chicago-based options trading firm

Favourite part of the job? I derived almost all of my pleasure from developing and using strategies that were neglected by traders who only took easy pickings. Also, the fixed hours – once the markets closed, that was it.

Worst part of the job? The fact that the only real purpose of the financial industry is to make money means that most people in the business are not nice people. The job was a bit soulless, and there is limited honest social interaction.

New career: Owner and manager of a chain of Pilates and movement studios called Options Studio

How did you get into this field? The transition was not planned and was very sudden. My wife was training to be a Pilates instructor, and I was forced into being her practice body. But I found it corrected my bad gym habits and helped my poor posture, caused by trading at a computer all day every day. My wife's mentor wanted to set up his own studio, so I agreed to get involved to give her something to do. Somehow, I ended up devoting more and more time to the new business and less and less time to trading.

Was the shift a difficult one? The shift was extremely difficult! Trading is an industry based on logic and 100 percent testosterone. Suddenly, I was surrounded by decisions based on emotion and feelings. But I really believe it has made me a nicer person. Now, I'm aware that the way people perceive my actions matters just as much as the way I intend them.

Most fulfilling part? What we do makes a positive difference in people's lives. I also benefit personally from better health.

Miss anything about your old job? Sometimes, I miss the freedom. And, of course the money – I can no longer buy apartments on a whim!

The verdict: old or new career? If I'm no longer needed at the studios, then I may trade part-time. Trading is very hard to give up and very easy to get back into. But if I gave up the studios thinking that trading would be more fulfilling, I would very quickly be reminded that human interaction beats working with computers, hands down. **A**

A man with a shaved head and blue eyes, wearing a dark blue t-shirt and shorts, is sitting on a gym bench. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background shows gym equipment like a pull-up bar and weights.

“ Suddenly, I was surrounded by decisions based on emotion and feelings. But I really believe it has made me a nicer person. ”