

# Create a New Work Identity After 40

*by Vince Winkel*

Monster Contributing Writer

Ann Froelich was approaching 50 and growing bored with her career in real estate development. With a bachelor's degree, an MBA and a lot of success, she needed a change.

"The approach of my 50th birthday and the fear that I would die in the same position with no growth intellectually, creatively or spiritually, compelled me to accept a position with another developer," Froelich explains. "That lasted about a year and a half, after which I encountered great difficulty in getting another job."

On a close friend's encouragement, Froelich took a giant leap of faith and got into jewelry making. "I had always been 'crafty' but had absolutely no experience in where or how to start making jewelry," she says. "Almost two years later, I have now reached a reasonable level of expertise and am actually studying to become a goldsmith."

## Why Change Careers?

Froelich is just one of the growing number of workers over 40 who are making a change or seriously considering it. But unlike Froelich, many don't have a choice. As the economy changes, more and more Canadians have to change in response.

"We're seeing a lot more people over the age of 40 making career changes," says Richard A. Johnson, senior vice president and chief of human resources for a staffing firm. "People who decide to make a change, or are forced to, need to do some serious homework. The job market has changed a lot since most of these people last looked for work."

Indeed, Froelich had to overcome several obstacles in pursuit of her new career. "My biggest challenge was redefining who I was, not just for the world, but more importantly, for me," she says. "I had spent a couple decades labeling myself as a marketing executive, and because my experience [in jewelry] was almost nonexistent, I hesitated to call myself a jewelry designer. I felt that I was a fraud."

It took Froelich about a year to begin feeling comfortable with her new career. She was thrilled with the pace, the focus and the artistic aspect of the job, although she took a pay cut.

## How to Make a Midlife Career Change

While Froelich knew what she wanted to do, many on the brink of change do not. Human resource experts offer the following self-analysis tips:

- Evaluate your current job satisfaction. Keep a journal of your daily reactions to your job situation, and look for recurring themes. Which aspects of your current job do you like? Dislike? Are these related to the work, your company culture or the people with whom you work?
- Assess your interests, values and skills through self-help resources. Review past successes to identify preferred activities and skills.
- Brainstorm ideas for career alternatives with friends, family, networking contacts and counselors. Visit career libraries, and use online resources like Monster Career Changers.
- Evaluate several fields to identify a few targets for in-depth research.
- Read as much as you can about those fields, and reach out to personal contacts in those arenas for informational interviews.
- Identify volunteer and freelance activities related to your target field to test your interests. For example, if you're considering publishing, try editing a local organization's newsletter.
- Investigate educational opportunities that can connect your background to your new field. Consider taking a course at a local college, spend some time at one-day or weekend seminars, and contact professional groups in your target field for suggestions.
- Look for ways to develop new skills in your current job that would pave the way for a career change. If your company offers in-house training, sign up for as many classes as you can.
- Consider alternative roles within your current industry that would utilize the industry knowledge you already have.