

EMPLOYEES ONLY

JOB LOSS, CAREER GAIN

LOSING A JOB *isn't something any of us wants, but sometimes having that push into UNCHARTERED territory might just be the best thing that could ever happen to you. These four SUCCESSFUL women are proof...*

WORDS DILVIN YASA



“MY BACK-TO-BACK REDUNDANCIES LEFT ME WITH EVERYTHING TO GAIN.”

JENNA TEMPLETON, 30, BLOGGER AND AUTHOR

I probably should have seen the first redundancy coming but the truth is that I was completely blind-sided by it. I was working my first full-time job in print media on a title I loved and believed in and although I knew the industry was (and is) going through a rough time, I honestly believed redundancy was something that only ever occurred later in life, not at the start or height of your career. When our publisher gathered us together and told us that the magazine was folding and that the whole team was being made redundant, it felt like, at the age of 29, I was having to start all over again.

Unlike most of the team who had to leave by the end of the week, I was kept on for another month and this gave me time to digest what had happened and at the same time look for redeployment within the same company. By the next week I had secured a similar role in another magazine

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“I WANTED TO BE MADE REDUNDANT.”

ANNE-MARIE ORROCK, MANAGING DIRECTOR, CORPORATE CANARY HR CONSULTING

in the same company. Lucky, right? Wrong. Only a couple of months later I found myself being called in for another meeting with the head publisher and this time, I knew what was coming.

When I heard the news, I felt like I couldn't breathe. People can feel defined by their career so I was emotionally grieving a big loss of identity, plus I couldn't believe it was happening all over again! This time there was no chance to be redeployed and I left the building feeling heartbroken, frustrated and scared.

My confidence was shaken to the core. There's something about being in a position where you have nothing to lose and everything to gain that can really change your mindset, and after a few months I realised I might have actually been handed the biggest opportunity I might ever see.

From that point on, I began focusing on personal projects I'd previously put on the backburner, such as working on my blog (My Life As A Magazine) as well as self-publishing my own independent craft, travel and nostalgic-themed publications, such as *Japan in a Collection* and *My Life in Biscuits*. I recently launched my latest title *Happy Mail Day* at this year's Sydney MCA Zine Fair.

On the back of that, I've since started working part-time at the same company I was made redundant from and this year I will be launching a new online hub called DIY Kiosk. The main focus will be on all things crafty and DIY related, featuring tutorials and an online shop (or kiosk).

It only happened last year but already I can see redundancy is rarely the career death knell some make it out to be. For me, it propelled my motivation and drive to succeed and made me numb to obstacles and setbacks. Where once I saw stumbling blocks, I can now only see opportunities and I can't wait for the next chapter.

I was happily working as an HR director for a US-based ICT [information communications technology] company when I heard the news we were being acquired by a large multinational.

I'd worked hard with the executives to develop a fantastic working culture but overnight my role went from an Asia Pacific-wide directorship to the equivalent of an HR business partner role.

It was clearly a backwards step in my career and I naturally expected a redundancy. Not only did I not want to stay on in a lower capacity role, I hoped that this would finally give me the push I needed to go into my own consultancy, which was something I'd been thinking about for some time.

It wasn't as easy as I'd hoped, however. The acquiring company needed key executive staff to stay in place to ensure there was no fallout with the staff and of course, I had a strong relationship with these people so I wanted to make sure they were taken care of first.

Many of them had been left hanging in these 'half roles' that were technical redundancies based on significant diminishment of their key responsibilities. I managed to get all of them either assigned with positions they were happy with or a redundancy package. It was only then that I could manage my own situation.

Despite the fact it was so blindly obvious my role had been significantly diminished, management tried to pretend that wasn't the case and it soon became clear to me they were trying to avoid paying my entitlements by hoping I'd get fed up and quit. After a lengthy period of negotiating figures and timeframes with the new HR director, we finally reached an amicable

agreement and I left that day with a mixed bag of feelings. The company gave me a grand send-off, which surprised me, and I felt relief, excitement, fear and wistful of old times.

I wish I could say I took a month off to recover but in truth, I started my own business the very next Monday. Since I knew the company was being acquired a good six months beforehand, I had started researching the potential of a business some time ago. I was a single mum with a six-year-old and I believed I had to show my son that you have to just jump in and try your best. I got my first client the first week and over the next eight years there have definitely been times of both feast and famine but I'm still here and I'm still grateful for the push.

People tend to fear redundancy but the truth is it can often serve as a catalyst for redirection, which can lead to more favourable circumstances long-term. I have now created an outplacement program called 'Take Flight! Career Advantage Transition Program' where I help companies effect redundancies and also help support impacted employees. When you've been through it yourself, you never lose empathy for others going through it.



“MY REDUNDANCY HELPED ME REINVENT THE WHEEL.”

ANJANETTE FENNEL, 41, LITERARY COACH AND AGENT

My daughter was two months old when I found out I'd lost my job as a literary agent. The email from my boss was very complimentary about my work, but stated times were tough and that they had to scale back financially. >

Because they were a small business, they weren't required to give me a redundancy payment and of course, I didn't get one. Suddenly, I found myself entirely on my own.

Initially I felt shocked and somewhat at a loose end. I'd been excited about getting back to work because not only had I missed talking to my clients and selling manuscripts, as my husband was only a few months into running his own business, we'd found it quite tough making ends meet on the government-paid parental leave, which was a significant step down from my income.

Knowing we only had two more months of paid parental leave left really put a strain on us so I set about looking for a new job immediately. Although I wanted desperately to remain in my industry, there are virtually no publishing jobs outside of Sydney or Melbourne (we'd moved to a smaller place near my husband's family) so I started searching for admin jobs in the local area to get by.

Everything was made even more complicated by the fact that I didn't know if I could get childcare, if I could even get the salary to pay for that childcare, and the flexible hours I required to coordinate multiple school runs for our older kids. Several months and hundreds of applications later, I was still jobless.

Around this time I started getting calls from past clients asking if I'd started working at another agency or if I'd gone out on my own and although I considered further education to become a career coach, fate intervened when I was asked by an established coach why I wasn't pursuing a path I was clearly passionate about – assisting authors/aspiring authors to get the best out of their manuscripts and get them paired with the right publisher.

Not long afterward I realised that's exactly what I should be doing – and this was my golden opportunity to do it on my own steam and on my own terms.

Since I started my literary coaching business, I've worked hard to change the rules of the 'standard' literary agent model, which used to drive me nuts.

Rather than reject most of the

work that lands on my desk as most literary agents would, I work to polish more rough stones into the true gems publishers are looking for in a competitive market.

I still get that same thrill when I'm working with new authors but it's a heightened feeling of excitement because the business is entirely mine. There's no denying redundancy was difficult but it allowed me to follow my passion and find a way of working that's fair to both my clients and my family.



"I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SOMETHING NEW."

SHERYL THAI, 30, FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF CUPCAKE CENTRAL

That gut-wrenching feeling you get when you're told you've been made redundant can only be likened to being given that whole 'it's not you, it's me' line from a guy you like.

At least, that's what it was like for me. I'd been working as an IT consultant for an American consultancy firm and right in the middle of the financial crisis, my manager called up late one evening requesting I come in for an early morning meeting.

Right away I knew something was up and after a sleepless night, I went into the meeting only to be given a yellow envelope by two of my senior managers and informed I no longer had a job. It wasn't me, it was them, apparently.

I walked out of the meeting room stunned – even though I'd woken up every morning feeling empty in a job that

wasn't making me happy, I didn't want to leave the company. I had worked hard and I was hoping for a promotion that year, to climb the ladder that would validate my existence in the corporate world. I got angry, I cried and I went through a lot of self-doubt. What will happen to me? How will I survive?

But then slowly the smoke started to clear and it dawned on me that this was a new start and great opportunity to do what I'd always wanted to do – start my own cupcake business!

Ever since I'd had a bite of a cupcake at New York's famous Magnolia Bakery 10 years ago, I'd been dreaming about doing something similar. And even though I was now being offered contracting roles paying huge amounts, I knew this was very much a 'now or never' moment for me. I took my redundancy payment (enough to see me through my mortgage payments for six months) and got to work setting up the business. To prevent myself from procrastinating, I even booked in stalls at a local market three months in advance so I'd have no excuse not to try my best to make it work.

Although I made mistakes along the way, I tried hard to block out the doubt. It's not the easiest thing in the world to go from corporate to cupcakes but I found that once I changed my thinking from 'what if I fail?' to 'how can I make this happen?', opportunity started to follow and a year later, my partner and I opened our first store, followed by another and another.

In the last three and a half years, we've opened three and a half stores (one is a pop-up), self-published a cookbook, taught over 1000 people in our Cupcake Masterclasses and we now employ 38 wonderful staff – and this is only the beginning of the adventure.

We've got so much more planned! Today I'm glad I was pushed out of my job – I'm not sure that I would have been brave enough to make the jump myself but it was definitely the best thing that ever could have happened to me. 🍪

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