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More to Life Than Shoes

How to Kick-start Your Career
and Change Your Life

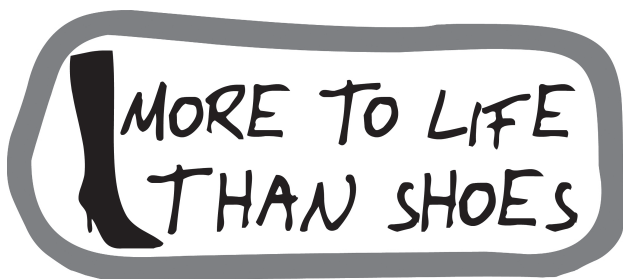
Written by

Nadia Finer & Emily Nash

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How to Kick-start Your Career
and Change Your Life

Nadia Finer & Emily Nash



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To our mums, who have always inspired us,
even if we didn't realize it at the time.

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With massive thanks to all the inspiring women who gave us their time, answered our questions, encouraged us and who made writing this book a truly amazing experience.

And of course thanks to our partners and families, who stuck with us on our long and sometimes bumpy journey to making this book happen.

An End to Duvet Days

If you want to change your life but don't know how, if you've got sock-puppets in your head telling you that you can't do it, if you're after a little less aspiration, a little more action: you're reading the right book. Come and join the revolution!

It's a sad state of affairs when the highlight of our day at work is buying shoes online, doing the coffee run or reading the paper on the bus. We spend half our lives at work: there should be so much more to it than this. We want to *love* what we do, not loathe it. So we wrote this book to help you get out there and damn well make your dream happen.

It all began in the pub, like so many great plans in history. We were fed up and having a moan. You know what it's like: pulling sickies because you can't face the day, realizing a week has passed and you can't remember what happened between Monday and Thursday, wanting to tell your partner about your day but not coming up with anything interesting enough to make it seem worth it. Sound familiar? Parisians even have a phrase for it – 'métro, boulot, dodo' – literally, 'train, work, sleep'. Yawn.

Nadia was working in marketing but fed up with her job and ready for a change. Emily was in television but dreaming of jacking it all in and becoming a writer instead. Neither of us was actually doing anything about all this, apart from complaining over a glass of wine. We wanted to love what we did with our lives, and we didn't. And loads of our mates didn't seem happy, either. Is it a girl thing to put

More To Life Than Shoes

up and shut up, to moan about work all week and splurge on new shoes to make ourselves feel better? We knew plenty of women who dreamed of writing books, getting promoted, opening flower shops or finally breaking into their perfect career, but none of them were doing it. Bills, babies and life in general always seemed to get in the way. We decided, after another glass of wine or three and some random scrawls on beer mats, that if we didn't want to spend our old age regretting the long duvet-day of our lives, the solution was to inspire ourselves and our mates with confidence so that we stopped focusing on the things that could go wrong and started thinking about how to make things go right.

But we needed help. We wanted to hear from girls who'd done their thing and lived happily ever after. But where were they? Women's magazines are full of celebs getting their kit off and enjoying their 15 minutes of fame, but that wasn't what we were after – we can't sing, and our boobs are *our* business. We knew there were other types of poster-girl out there, otherwise what was all that bra-burning for? But they didn't seem to be talked about that much and we couldn't understand why.

So that night in the pub we decided to go on a mission to find some girl-on-girl action, so to speak. Us lot are supposed to be good at talking, right? Well, we'd find these wonder women, corner them and pump them for advice. We'd talk to the people we thought were cool – neuroscientists and novelists, biologists and builders, entrepreneurs and engineers – and we'd find out exactly how they made their dreams come true.

So that's what we've done. It's taken a bloody long time, to be honest: over four years, in fact, since we started sending out requests to the famous and not-so-famous (for us, cool doesn't necessarily equal celeb) to ask if we could talk to them about their careers. During that time we've held down jobs and popped out babies, and there've

An End to Duvet Days

been times when our mission to inspire the women of Britain had to take a back seat. But then along came the chance to turn all our hard work into a book and tell everyone else what we've found out.

Because since we started our journey, we've discovered some brilliant things – that there are thousands of women out there right now doing amazing stuff, and that there's really no excuse for us not to do it, too. But the most amazing result of our quest has been that in the stories of the hundred or so women we've spoken to we've noticed a pattern – something brilliant going on behind the scenes, a way of living and tackling the world that produces results. It's accessible, sensible advice that we're going to share with you so that you can do it, too.

Ladies, it's time to ditch the drudge and kick-start our lives.

The More To Life Than Shoes Manifesto

We believe there's more to life than:

**Dreaming about making a change
but doing nothing about it**

Everyone should have a bit of passion in their lives.

Telling yourself you can't do it

If you don't believe in yourself, nobody will.

Slogging away in a job you hate

You spend most of your life at work, so why not do something you love? It's not prison, people.

Competing against other women

Ditch the bitching. Let's help each other out a little. Women working together makes us powerful.

Vacuous celebs being held up as role models

There are so many inspiring women out there doing amazing things, most of whom don't feel the need to get their kit off at every available opportunity.

Shopping

We love spoiling ourselves when we get the chance – but c'mon, it's not an Olympic sport. We're capable of so much more.

1 Passion Power

Life without passion: it's a hollow existence. Grey mornings, dull evenings and long, boring bits in between – it's not much fun. If we're miserable with life, then it might be because we're not passionate about what we do.

For some people, passion seems to burn inside them. They've always known what they wanted to do with their lives. They have to do as their passion tells them; there's no other option. It's a done deal. Well, it's all right for them, but what of the rest of us? When we were kids we might have passionately wanted to be an astronaut (Emily), a professional show-jumper (Nadia) or burned with the dream of painting people's prosthetic limbs in pretty colours to cheer them up (Emily's sister), but nowadays that all seems like a lifetime away. Having time and energy to think about our passions is a luxury we can't afford. We've got no clear vision of where we're going or what we want to do. So how do we go about getting some oomph back into our lives?

We wanted to talk to women who blazed with excitement about what they do, in the hope that it'd give us some clues about where to look. It turns out, passion is pretty powerful stuff – once you've discovered what turns you on, there's no going back. Careers take unexpected turns, lives are changed forever, you get stronger and find you can do things you never thought possible.

To kick off, we went to speak to someone whose passion for her cause transformed a one-woman campaign into a national charity. We'd like to introduce you to the power of passion.

Sharon Berry and Storybook Dads

We find some passion in prison and discover why loving your job can change your life

'I never asked myself why I was doing what I was doing, it just became part of me.' Sharon Berry, Storybook Dads

Sharon Berry was a single mum stuck in a rut. Life working behind a bar was a long way from anything she had a passion for. But rather than settle for an unfulfilling job, Sharon set about transforming her life. To find out how she did it, we travelled to the forbidding Dartmoor Prison, where Sharon's passion has led to the creation of the unique Storybook Dads – a charity that helps prisoners read bedtime stories to their kids.

Driving across the lonely Devon moors to the isolated prison, Sharon told us how she discovered her new career path. 'When I was 35 I was working in a pub, and most of the jobs I'd had up 'til then had been unskilled. I knew I wanted to do something different, but I wasn't sure what. Someone suggested I should go back into higher education. I was frightened at first, I didn't think I'd be good enough. I thought I'd be discovered and chucked out. But I applied and I loved it.'

After getting her degree, Sharon was offered the chance to do voluntary work at HMP Channings Wood in Devon, helping the

writer-in-residence there. She had never worked in a prison before but, intrigued and looking for a new challenge, she said yes. She soon realized she had discovered a job she could put her heart into. 'I loved the atmosphere of the prison. People have a negative view of life inside a gaol, but often inside you are seeing these men at their best. On the outside they might have drugs problems or other stresses, but those aren't there on the inside, so you see them in a different light.'

It was at the prison that Sharon came across the idea of recording the men reading stories for their children. Spotting something she could do that would really make a difference, she brought the concept to Dartmoor Prison and registered it as a charity. Storybook Dads had been created.

'It helps the prisoners, but it also helps their children,' Sharon says. 'These men want to be good dads, but they don't know how. We're helping them to feel valued and to know that they can still do something for their kids.'

When we arrived at the prison we had to leave almost everything we'd brought with us in the car: No mobile phones, laptops or recording devices are allowed inside. It was a problem Sharon had to overcome when she brought the idea to Dartmoor: 'It was a real struggle even getting permission to bring a recording device in. It was hard to get people to believe in it. It wasn't part of what goes on in a prison, and some people didn't see why it should be. It was a case of being tenacious and not giving in.'

Our first stop was the Resettlement Unit, where long-term prisoners are housed before being released. This is where Sharon was first given a cell to run Storybook Dads from. 'When I started out, I was doing all the editing of the stories at home. My husband used to shout to me to come to bed, and I'd shout back that I couldn't because there was too much to do. I couldn't believe it when they gave me my

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own cell! We had the editing equipment in there after that, and the prisoners started to learn how to edit themselves.'

Dartmoor is known as one of the roughest prisons in the UK; some of the guys we passed on the wings aren't people you'd want to meet down a dark alley. It must take dedication and a lot of energy to love coming to work here as much as Sharon seems to. But she's relaxed and clearly at home. Tattoo-covered men twice her size shouted out hellos to her wherever we went, calling her 'Miss' if they didn't remember her name. She gets a buzz from being able to help these men connect with their kids.

'The thing is,' she says, 'I'm not a confident person in other ways. One of the biggest challenges I've faced has been speaking in public. It terrified me. But you have to do it in the end, because someone has to.' Sharon loves what she does and believes passionately in it, and this seems to override other parts of her personality when it comes to the crunch.

Sharon took us to the Storybook Dads centre, where the prisoners who work on editing the stories had just come back from lunch. These days, Sharon relies on a whole team to help her run the charity. The atmosphere was relaxed as staff and prisoners sat around finishing cups of tea and biscuits. It felt like a buzzy, friendly office.

'This is the only bit of the prison that doesn't feel like a prison,' Sharon says. 'I love coming in to work here.'

This is the nerve centre of Storybook Dads. Over 80 prisons around the country are now running the scheme, and most of them send their recordings here to be edited.

Sharon played us a recording by a prisoner from the travelling community who had never been taught to read. He repeated the story *The Ugly Duckling* line by line after a volunteer, whose voice was

then edited out. It's for his three-year-old daughter, and he finished with an emotional message for her, telling her he loved her and to sleep well.

'Some people say the prisoners don't deserve to have contact with their kids, but the kids deserve to know their parents – they've done nothing wrong,' says Sharon.

So what drives someone to create such an influential nationally recognized charity from scratch? 'I never asked myself why I was doing what I was doing,' Sharon says. 'It just became part of me. I just saw what needed to be done, task by task, and I did it. At one point I was working 70 or 80 hours a week, and it was exhausting. But it wasn't like working those hours at a job you hate – I loved it.' Wow – that's what we're after. Being so in love with your job that it doesn't feel like work. Sounds brilliant.

What's inspiring about Sharon is that she doesn't even see herself as a particularly driven person. She's almost off-hand when she talks about her achievements. She admits it was hard work, but her passion for her cause makes it a challenge, not a slog. It's transformed an idea that might have helped a few men as a small-scale prison project into a national charity with the potential to change the lives of thousands of people for the better. It's also transformed Sharon's life.

We came out of Dartmoor Prison buzzing with enthusiasm for what Sharon's achieved, and we told everyone we met about it for weeks afterwards. Sharon's sheer excitement about what she does rubbed off on us – this passion stuff is catching. We want what she's having!

- **Passion overrides all – low confidence, nerves, insecurity? Passion wins.**
- **Saying yes to random opportunities puts you in places where your passion might lurk. Have a go at it.**

Obsession Confession: Artist Zoe Mendelson

An artist tells us there's no such thing as a blank canvas

'You've got to burn! You've got to have fire inside you!'

Artist Zoë Mendelson's mum

We decide to talk to an artist next, because they're an intense bunch when it comes to their work. All that chopping off ears and walking around with ocelots on leads – they must be either passionate or just plain barking, and we're hoping it's the former. Zoë Mendelson, who creates beautiful drawings with the feel of fairytale illustrations, is no exception. Her love for her work oozes from her like jam out of a doughnut. 'Lots of talented people don't become artists because they don't have the drive or obsession to back up the talent. I often think of myself as the reverse, and wonder if the desire was in place before any skills. I remember my mum saying, "If you really want to do this, you've got to burn! You've got to have fire inside you!" I thought, "I'm only doing my GCSE," but I'm grateful for her melodrama now.'

Zoë's illustrations are gorgeous, and when you look closer, some of them are really rather naughty. They leave us feeling suitably inspired – they've got a kind of confused harmony to them, which we ask Zoë about.

'I love art's uselessness. What you do doesn't save someone's life, but it's about thinking, it's about conversation – it's about these things that go on around our world. It can incorporate anything. There's a melting pot of thinking that's so completely enjoyable. I couldn't do anything else.'

Zoë's enthusiasm for her work is infectious. We love the idea of struggling to keep an ever-increasing number of ideas under control. We're more familiar with the feeling of staring at a blank page, or into space, desperately trying to force ideas to come. We asked Zoë if she ever has to struggle with artist's block, but it seems that, for her, a blank canvas isn't a fear. The real challenge is to finish what she's started before the next idea gets in the way. We like her take on blank canvases – she thinks they're not really empty at all. Even choosing a canvas in the first place is a decision, and a step in the direction of a finished work. Love it – does that mean that when we're staring gormlessly out of the window we're actually well on the way to a genius idea? We hope so.

- **There's no such thing as a blank canvas. Just making a decision to look for change is a change in itself.**

Don't Just Dream It: The Double Life of Preethi Nair

Preethi discovers her passion for writing and throws common sense to the wind.

Preethi Nair did what loads of us dream of – she jacked in her sensible job to write a best-selling novel. But when you hear her story of writing in secret, double identities and imaginary agents, it starts to sound amazing. Preethi certainly knows a bit about passion, and what to do when it strikes.

Preethi's gripping tale began on the Underground on her way to work. 'I was a management consultant, but I felt that there had to be more to life; I'd go to work every day thinking, "Is this it?" I was missing passion and energy. I dreamed of waking up each morning

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and thinking, "Yes, this is what I want to do!" I'd never experienced that feeling before, but I knew it was out there. I knew you could love what you did. The idea that I'd still be doing what I was doing now in ten years' time was awful.'

Desperate to do something more creative, Preethi started writing a story every morning on the way to work about following your dreams. The story gradually turned into a novel called *Gypsy Masala*.

Preethi would gaze at the shelves in Waterstone's, picturing how her book would look there, even though she had only written a handful of pages. Her passion had been sparked; she wanted to be a full-time writer. Now she had to take the next step.

'Once I'd finished the book, I re-read it – and this is going to sound so big-headed, but I thought, "D'you know what? This is actually quite good. I like reading this. And I have to do something about it. I want to be a published author; I want to get this book out there.'"

Preethi was worried that if she announced her plan to her friends and family, they'd try to talk her out of it. 'My parents had sacrificed a lot to keep us fed and clothed, and my dad wanted me to be a lawyer. I didn't want to disappoint him, so I didn't tell him.'

And just like that, Preethi embarked on her double life. She went into work and resigned, telling her boss she was going to be an author. After that she left the house every morning wearing a suit as if she were going to work, but actually headed for the library instead, where she worked on her manuscript and hatched her plans for an assault on the publishing industry. Nobody had any idea of what she was up to.

Preethi tried to find a publisher for her novel, and sent out her manuscript, expecting offers to start flying in. She got rejected by every single company.

'I felt completely dejected. But one letter I got back gave me a tiny glimmer of hope. It said, "Dear Preethi, I love your writing style; it's not for us but I promise you, good writing will out in the end.'" OK, so, they rejected me, but I clung to the fact that one professional person believed in me, even a little. Rejection happens all the time. Believe in yourself, don't take rejection too personally and don't let it stop you.'

Preethi took matters into her own hands. So no publisher wanted her book? Then she'd publish it herself. No one would promote it? She'd do that herself, too.

We love this bit of the story! Preethi started her own publishing company, and created an imaginary PR agent for herself, whom she named Pru. She'd phone up journalists as Pru, and then pretend to 'put them through' to Preethi, answering the phone in a different voice. Genius. It worked, too. 'I needed to become somebody else, somebody who was confident, feisty, could accept rejection.'

Publishers usually work six months in advance with bookshops to buy up shelf space, so when Preethi popped into every bookshop she could find in London and asked them to stock her book, it was an uphill struggle. She pulled it off, though; shops agreed to take the book and it became 'staff choice' in some. Then one day she walked into a major bookshop, and discovered that *Gypsy Masala* was at Number 2 in its bestseller charts. It was a confirmation that following her passion had been the right decision.

Preethi insists she's not necessarily advocating drastic action. 'Taking a little step towards your goal is the key – it shows commitment and things suddenly start to come your way. It doesn't have to be a big step like I took, because mine was quite mad, but, say you wanted to become a dancer, your first step would be to look up courses. That's not too daunting. Once you do something, you'll be amazed by the amount of serendipity that comes your way.'

- **Embrace split personalities – too scared to do it yourself? Create an alter-ego who loves the challenge.**
- **Don't take rejection personally – The Beatles, Beatrix Potter, J K Rowling, H G Wells ... all got rejected several times over before they hit the big time.**

Doing Is Like Dominoes: Camila Batmanghelidjh and Kids Company

How small actions lead to big things

We met Camila Batmanghelidjh at the offices of Kids Company, the charity she set up to help disadvantaged kids in urban areas. There was a buzz of things going on behind the scenes: staff on phones or holding impromptu meetings in corridors crowded with piles of donated computer equipment. Camila sat in the middle of the muddle looking very much like a mother figure – her trademark voluminous and brightly printed turban and dress summing up her personality.

Kids Company supports around 14,000 children a year, helping with problems including homelessness, drugs and prostitution. It's an achievement which is very much down to Camila's passion for her cause.

'I've always known that I wanted to work with children. I believe that serving others is the biggest gift you can give yourself. I trained in psychotherapy and got a job as a part-time therapist with a children's charity in London. It was a miserable environment with no resources or money. I used to stand in the queue at Harrods and ask anyone who was buying a toy if they could buy something else as well for the charity. Eventually I managed to equip a whole therapy room in this way.'

But Camila came to the conclusion that there was something fundamentally wrong with the way we try to help the most vulnerable children. Those who needed help the most often didn't have an adult in their lives who would bring them to therapy. Camila decided a practical approach to the problem was called for: 'I set up a therapy centre at an inner-city school. It was basically a converted broom cupboard.' This room blossomed into the idea for Kids Company: a centre for children who don't have a properly functioning family to look after them. When they come in they can get three meals a day and get help from teachers, psychologists and youth workers. The help on offer ranges from therapy to a trip to the dentist.

It's clear that Camila is a driven woman. She remortgaged her flat twice to keep things afloat when funding dried up. The magnitude of curing something as huge and fundamental as child abuse and poverty doesn't deter Camila. 'I understand that I'm engaged in a task that is beyond me as an individual. I don't have a personal right to fury on these issues.'

For Camila, having a cause that she believes in is the root of her achievement. 'People worry about how good or bad they will be at something, and that stops them achieving it. But any achievement rests in the power of action, and we all have the capacity to act. Just do. Doing is like dominoes, a chain reaction which will lead you to the right place.'

- **Instead of worrying about whether you can, just do it. Taking action triggers what follows.**

'I knew nothing about boxing until it crept up and tapped me on the shoulder. A friend asked if I'd go with her to a keep-fit kickboxing class. Once I threw my first punch, that was it. I felt like I was doing what I was born to do.

First I had to find a boxing gym that would welcome a woman, and then when I turned professional I had to fight just to get fights. Now boxing is my life-blood, my hobby, my passion, my obsession – and my job. It's an impossible dream come true.' Laura Saperstein, professional boxer

Talking to passionate people like Zoë Mendelson and Camila Batmanghelidjh is inspiring – these ladies seem to have it sorted. They've got their drive, they know what they're doing and they love it. But what happens if you still haven't worked out what you want to be doing? Is it too late? Does passion need to be hard-wired from an early age?

We're sure that being born with a burning desire to follow a certain path is pretty rare. Discovering what turns us on might be a gradual dawning, or it might hit us lightning-bolt style, as it did for Christine Finnegan.

Flicking the Switch: Christine Finnegan

A job doesn't need to be exotic to fill us with passion: how teaching changes lives

'I get a buzz from the minute I wake up knowing I'm coming into work, to the minute I go home.'

Christine Finnegan, teacher

Christine Finnegan is fired up about teaching. It might not sound that glamorous next to some of the other careers we're covering in this book, but it's got to be one of the most important jobs out there, and one of the most rewarding.

We first came across Christine when she was named Outstanding New Teacher of the Year at the Teaching Awards a few years back, and we loved her story. It summed up what was cool about all the thousands of women doing everyday jobs they adore and which make a huge difference to other people's lives.

Christine wasn't always a teacher. She started out as a mechanical engineer. Then one day she volunteered at her son's school, taking a class out on a nature walk in the local woods. It was a life-changing experience. 'That was it for me. I was hooked. I found I loved working with children, and I decided I was going to change career. So I came into school as a part-time volunteer. I absolutely loved it. Eventually I gave up my old job and went to night school to do an advanced diploma in childhood education.'

Christine was taken on as a teaching assistant at the school part-time, but she enjoyed being there so much that she stayed on full-time as a volunteer. When she went back to university to retrain, juggling time

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at the school was tough. 'I'd leave the school to go to lectures, then come back in afterwards. It was really hard, especially when you've got a family to look after as well. But I didn't mind because I was enthused by it.'

Christine is now a full-time teacher, and talks warmly about her day-to-day work. 'It's a passion for me. Every day is different, every day I learn something new. It's the children who motivate me. I want to inspire them to come to school and see that learning can be fun. Seeing the light go on when you're talking about something, making it real for them – I love it!'

We asked her about the downsides to her job. Christine sounds uncertain. 'Without the support of my husband it would've been impossible, because he looked after the house while I was studying. He still moans now, three years down the line, that I haven't taken back some of those roles. I'm in school at 8 o'clock, and I don't leave 'til the site manager throws me out. But the children keep me going, and we have such fun.' It doesn't sound like too much of a downside to us!

Christine's headteacher at the school put her forward for the Teaching Awards because of her passion and hard work. 'It was like the Oscars! The best thing was coming back to see the kids, though. They'd decorated my classroom with balloons and banners. That was the icing on the cake, sharing it with them.'

'Teaching never used to be recognized as one of the prestigious professions,' Christine says. 'But that's beginning to change. The salary might not be amazing, but the rewards are huge. You do it for the passion of the job. I have children who've gone on to high school coming back and saying, "You taught me the fun way of doing it," which is brilliant.'

We love the fact that Christine didn't even know she was missing something in her life until she stumbled across it by accident. It's

reassuring that something so life-changing can hit you – wham! – totally by surprise.

- **There are thousands of jobs out there – maybe you just haven't found the one to fit you yet. Trying new things – that's the fun bit.**
- **Passion strikes when you least expect it. It's a bit like falling in love: things will never be the same again.**
- **Volunteering is a good way to uncover hidden passions. Get out there, give up your time and see where it takes you.**

'It's so important to love what you do. If work is mundane and your heart's not in it, your ideas and freshness will be limited and you'll just do the bare minimum. I love my job dearly and I'm always asking myself what I can do to take it further. On stage, I sometimes start thinking, "What am I doing?" But I get my grin on and push through. So, whatever your passion, keep your end goal in mind and do what you need to do. I've made the tea and cleaned pianos, but I always took pride in everything I did. Nothing is beneath you. If I hadn't thought like this, I'd still be a session musician or that girl who was in Hear'Say. Do something that scares the life out of you every single day.'

Myleene Klass, musician and entrepreneur

With a Pinch of Salt: Heather Weston

Passion, sweat and tears: turning a hobby into a career

We love the feeling of having a new notebook. Stationery porn, as we like to call it, often has us panting over leather-bound objects tied up with ribbons. So when we met book artist and designer Heather Weston at an open-studio event, we were hooked on her beautiful hand-made journals and books. We love her story, too – Heather didn't start out as an artist, she discovered her passion after ten years' slogging away as a manager in the psychotherapy field.

Heather realized that she wasn't doing what she wanted to with her life, so she started a part-time Art Foundation course while still working. She loved it so much that she resigned from her job and took up a full-time place on a Book Art MA, learning book design and binding. Heather decided she wanted to turn her new hobby into a business, so she ploughed all her savings into Bookery, a company supplying sumptuous leather journals and notebooks. Now she juggles life as a young mum with time in her studio designing and creating book art and contemporary stationery.

Lots of us dream of turning a hobby into a career. It sounds lovely – doing the thing you love doing anyway, *and* making money from it. Bliss. But is it really as great as it sounds?

'You have to have good self-motivation,' Heather tells us. 'I don't think you have the desire to set up your own business unless you do. But the flip side of that is that you can become bad at relaxing and taking time out. My mantra is "For god's sake go and get some lunch, it's 3 o'clock already!" Plus, I know I spend far too much time with my business, sometimes at the expense of my closest relationships. But I had my eyes open from the start to the fact that it was going to be

difficult. Long periods of relative poverty can be very demoralizing, and you start dreaming of having a steady income again. But having the odds against me didn't put me off – in fact, it was a chance to prove something to myself.

The life of a designer can be tough, with long days spent alone in the studio, plenty of boring bits and cash-strapped periods to get through. It's during these times that your passion for your work needs to drive you on and keep you going. 'When you have so many things to juggle as a small business, it's easy to let the creativity slip. Sometimes I have to step back and look at what makes me feel jaded. Once I've worked out what is getting me down, I can ditch it.'

Heather leaves us with a cautionary warning about the long, hard slog of turning a passion into a paying business. 'I'm only just feeling that I'm on my way to achieving my goal now. The sharp highs and lows early on have been replaced by a far more sustained feeling of slow and steady growth which is more fulfilling. In future, I hope for slightly less work and slightly more reward!'

- **Turning a hobby into a job might sound fun, but it's hard work. Be prepared to bash through the boring bits as well.**

Floating Your Boat: Hilary Lister

Never mind life-changing: how passion can save lives, too

We've got one more 'case study' on passion for you before we move on. Hilary Lister is living proof that finding a passion can be life-changing – and also, for her, life-saving.

Confined to a wheelchair for most of her adult life, Hilary became the first quadriplegic to sail solo across the English Channel when she

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discovered a passion for sailing. She's convinced that it was this which stopped her from giving up on herself entirely and simply fading away.

Hilary wanted to be a biochemist when she was younger, and even the onset of a degenerative disease which left her in a wheelchair without the use of her legs didn't stop her working towards that dream. She read Biochemistry at Oxford, but then, at the age of 26, Hilary's life changed forever. Her condition deteriorated and she became paralysed from the neck down. 'I'd lost everything. I couldn't work, I needed help to dress, eat, brush my teeth, go to the toilet, even to move when I was uncomfortable. To lose my freedom was heartbreaking. I just sat at home wondering whether it was worth continuing. I had got that low.'

Hilary found salvation in an unexpected place. A friend asked her if she would like to go sailing with her. 'I thought about it for about half a second and said yes. And within a minute of being in the boat, I was in love.'

But being a passenger didn't quench Hilary's thirst. 'I wanted to sail like everyone else, so I decided I was going to sail solo across the Channel. The only trouble was, I had no boat, no money, and no idea whether it was actually possible. But I was so passionate about it that I made other people passionate, too.' Not one to worry about the practicalities, Hilary's goal was set; her heart had spoken.

Hilary found a solution to her seemingly insurmountable problem. It was a technology developed in the US which allows people without the use of their hands to send signals to electronic equipment by sipping and puffing through a straw. It could be used to control a boat, and Hilary leapt at the chance to try it. 'Convincing people I could do this took a lot of determination and more than a pinch of madness.'

Following her passion meant overcoming physical difficulties most of us would find it hard to imagine, but Hilary succeeded, achieving

more than she, or anyone else, had thought possible. In 2005 she became the first quadriplegic person to sail solo across the Channel. She took things one step further in 2009 when she became the first disabled woman to sail solo around the coast of Britain. The 1,800-mile journey took her three months.

We asked her what gives her the strength to attempt these voyages. 'When I decide to do something, I do it, that's the way I am. If somebody tells me I can't, that just makes me more determined. Sailing stopped me from taking my own life. I found a part of myself that I thought had died, the part that fights. Everybody has the fight inside them; you just have to find it.'

We're blown away by Hilary's story. This passion stuff is amazing: we don't want to live without it.

- **Passion is catching – burning with enthusiasm for something can ignite the people around you, helping you find unexpected help and support.**

What We Think

Passion can be a hard thing to uncover. It can take some people years to work out what's going to make them leap out of bed in the mornings. But we're not disheartened – the process of finding out what turns you on is fun. It's a chance to try new stuff, notice things around us and meet exciting new people. Not a bad way to spend our time, we reckon. Then one day it'll hit us, and things will never be the same again.

We love the fact that passion is contagious. Visiting Dartmoor Prison with Sharon Berry had us telling her story to all our friends; after seeing Camila's work at Kids Company we were looking at volunteering options; Preethi's passion for publication gave us hope for our own

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book. Once you've got the passion, you'll pass it on, triggering a chain reaction in the people around you. Anything could happen!

It's all very well discussing and planning, but we're fans of talking less and doing more. You don't need to jack in your job right now, jump on a plane or sign the lease on a business premises tomorrow; once you know what you want to do, break it into smaller steps, and then just take the first of them. Do some research, apply for courses – these aren't scary things when you start out small, but they'll start your chain reaction.

YOUR PASSION SHOE BOX



- *Finding your passion can take time, but it's the fun bit.*
- *Open yourself up to new experiences: volunteer, take courses, say 'yes' to opportunities, no matter how random they may seem.*
- *Passion is catching. Fire up the people around you by enthusing about your aspirations and ideas.*
- *Passion overcomes all. Self-doubt, nerves or lack of confidence are not an option.*
- *Talk less, do more. There's no time like now to start your new life – make a plan, break it into small steps, and get on with it.*

Try This: Love Board

If you're lucky you may already know what your passion is, but for most of us, working out exactly what we want can be tough. Try this and see if it helps.

First, visualize yourself living your dream life. Concentrate on your vision and build a clear picture in your head. Now, start to focus on the little details. Where are you? What can you see? What sounds can you hear? Who's with you? What are people saying? What are you feeling? What are you going to do later?

Now, take a big piece of paper and create a 'Love Board' showing your perfect life. Cut up magazines and print off pictures that show how you'd like your life to be or that you're drawn to. Just stick them anywhere on the piece of paper, and also write key words that spring to mind with a big marker pen.

Give the board a title and stick it up somewhere you can see it every day, like in your office or on your fridge. Whenever you look at it, it'll remind you what you're aiming for.

Hold on, though, we're not finished. Sticking your dream life up on the wall all sounds very encouraging, but recent research by psychologist Professor Richard Wiseman, published in his book *59 Seconds*, has shown that just visualizing your goal on its own is not enough. Doing this will only make you more likely to spend time day-dreaming and, therefore, less likely to succeed.

To turn your dream life into reality, you need to make a plan – break your goal down into small steps that are in themselves specific, doable and have a time limit. Write these out and stick them next to your Love Board on the fridge, and get started making it happen. Tick them off as you go.

Top Tips on Finding Your Passion - Life Coach Jayne Morris

From Arrrgh! to Ahhhhh ...

'Find five positive words you would *least* associate with your current work. Write them down. For example: happy, funky, inspiring, fulfilling, exciting. Now take your five positive words and turn them into a sentence starting with 'My work is/gives me/allows me to ...' How does this sentence make you feel? This is the buzz you're looking for when you think about finding your passion.'

Playtime

'Playing lets us indulge our passions. We're great at it when we're kids, but often as adults we forget how to play. Spend ten minutes each day rediscovering your sense of play. Have fun with it. You might try doodling a picture on a page, pretending to be Wonder Woman and whirling around the room, skipping in the garden, buying paints and getting messy creating your very own masterpiece or making a drum kit out of pots and pans. Let your imagination run wild. And don't worry about looking silly, you can always draw the curtains.'

The Hidden You

'Take a piece of paper and draw a table. Down the left side, write the numbers 8, 15 and 22. Now make two columns, one called 'WHAT' and one called 'WHY'. Now, in the WHAT column you're going to list the things that you were mad about at certain stages in your life – 8-year-old child, moody 15-year-old teenager, and 22-year-old adult. It might be My Little Pony, Morrissey, snogging, snowboarding or cider. Now in the WHY column, write what it was about these things that turned you on. This is the hard bit, so think carefully. These are your

Passion Power

vital clues to the areas where your passions lie – what brings you pleasure and what you're good at.'

*Jayne Morris is a coach specializing in personal and career development
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