

CHAPTER ONE

Using Old Smarts for an Upstart

From high-profile marketing executive to international cookie queen: The story of Franny Martin.

Franny Martin doesn't seem like someone who would walk off the job on a whim. On this particular Thursday morning it's just past 7 a.m. and already the thin, late 60s woman is a happy flurry of activity. She flings open the door to the large commercial oven, and quickly hoists several ten-pound trays containing five dozen cookies each onto a large metal rack, which she then pushes across the 32-foot kitchen to a cooling room, where she grabs previously cooled cookies and immediately scurries them over to the packaging counter. It's a carefully choreographed, precisely-timed dance that leaves little room for error and no room for lollygagging.

"In-batch in two," she cheerfully calls out--almost sings--to the young, blond-haired assistant who's carefully overseeing a large batch of cookie dough churning in a commercial-sized mixer. "Final prep the batch."

"Okay. Two minutes. I'm ready."

The next batch of ten dozen dark chocolate chunk macadamia cookies is about to go into the oven. And in 13 minutes, Franny will start her little dance all over again.

No, Franny's definitely no slouch, and she's certainly not one to walk away from responsibility. She's a hard worker and conscientious. She always has been. She's held top-level marketing positions at some of the most prestigious names in the food service business:

McDonald's, Burger King, and Domino's Pizza. But one late Spring afternoon, while working at her most recent high-powered corporate job, something inside her clicked. Then snapped.

“One day I was just sitting in my office thinking about my dad, who was in the last stages of dementia, and a very good friend who was diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer,” Franny recalls. “Out of nowhere, a question just popped into my head: ‘If this were my last day on earth, is this what I would want to be doing?’ The answer was, ‘Nope.’ And I quit. Right then and there.”

She didn't even take time to “sleep on it.” Franny Martin just got up from her chair, packed up her office, announced her departure, walked out the door, and never looked back. She shocked her co-workers, as well as herself.

After more than 30 years in high-profile, high-paying corporate jobs, Franny Martin made the decision to chuck it all in about 30 seconds. It was the first – and only – time in her life that she became a quitter.

In that moment, she did what a Merrill Lynch survey says 43 million of us Baby Boomers *dream* of doing every day: quit our jobs to find a more meaningful lives as our own bosses. But the Bureau of Labor statistics says that only about 18% of us that want to take the leap, do.

Why is that? If so many of us Baby Boomers are so frustrated with our current lives, why do we only daydream about venturing into a career that satisfies our hearts' desires? There are a couple of reasons. First, it's difficult to leave the security of a regular, spoon-fed paycheck, paid health insurance, paid vacation days, and the camaraderie of co-workers. Security is a powerful lure, especially if you are financially strapped.

But more than security keeps us neatly tucked in our safe little corporate jobs – especially if we've reached the ranks of middle manager or higher: the myth of self-actualization. Maslow's

hierarchy says that we are all striving for self-actualization – to be the best that we can be, to achieve our highest potential. After years of toil we finally get the corner office – or at least an office that isn't a cubicle. Many Boomers, like Franny, who have finally grabbed the brass ring get addicted to the prestige that such a high-level position brings. And corporations perpetuate the self-actualization hype.

Franny knew that all too well.

“Every time I got promoted, or got to go on an exciting trip, I would be so proud, and so excited,” Franny recalls. “And my bosses gave me such great kudos. They told me how important I was, that I was really going places, that I was invaluable to the company, and that I should be proud of what I had achieved. But each time I got a great promotion, my dad told me: ‘Don't believe the hype. They will tell you that you are so important to the company, that you have such a great job, that you're going places; but they can take it all away from you in an instant.’”

It wasn't until that day in April when Franny fully stopped believing the hype.

It's easy to fall into that trap. Unfortunately, that trap often prevents us from finding true happiness. Perhaps that's why so many of us who have “real” jobs find it difficult to allow ourselves to even ask whether we're happy or not in our careers and in our life. We've been fed the hype for so long, and we've invested so much of our lives in it that we've bought into the fallacy – whether consciously or unconsciously. The thought of admitting the hype is just a lot of hot air that can deflate our balloon of financial security at any moment is too painful to ponder. So we stamp out those annoying little moments of melancholy and press on with the business at hand.

Franny avoided the dizzying power trip of a high-profile job and was able to walk off the job so easily without a second thought because of one thing: She had found the single most potent antidote to the “self-actualization” trap that goes with a high-status job—mortality. As she watched

her father and friend go through life-altering illnesses, she now had a clear and compelling answer to the “why” question. *Why* did she want a change? *Why* was going out on her own important from a values perspective – not merely a financial one? Although she had a job that she loved, and even though she had no idea what she wanted to do next or how she would survive financially, once she was able to identify the *reason* behind her desire for change it was enough for her to make a life-changing decision in a matter of seconds with no regrets. Reasons motivate, and once we know the real reasons behind our feelings, we can make clearer decisions. Too often people get hung up on the “what-do-I-want-to-do-with-my-life” question. But it’s the “why” question that is the most powerful motivator and the real source of happiness because that forces us to clearly define our value system. Franny had no idea *what* she wanted to do, but she knew that tending to personal relationships was more important to her than the brass ring.

“I just wanted more freedom, more flexibility to spend with my ailing dad and my friend,” Franny recalls. “You can’t do that when you work for someone else. I knew this was right and I knew I wanted out (of corporate America). There wasn’t anything to think about; I just knew I couldn’t take one more single day of that. I didn’t want to waste one more day not being able to tend to my dad and my friend when they needed me.”

Her husband, though supportive, was less ecstatic. The couple needed a second paycheck to survive financially, and Franny’s impulsive decision came as a surprise.

“When I arrived home that night and announced I had quit my job -- without any discussion -- he just got real quiet for awhile. Then he calmly asked, ‘So, what is it you think you want to do instead?’”

“Well,” Franny pondered as she stared out the window into the back yard, “You always talk about how much you like those cookies I make. Maybe I could do something with that.”

“Something with that” became *Cookies on Call*, a cookie delivery service. It launched two *days* after Franny had quit her job. Her little crumb of an idea turned into a quarter-million-dollars in dough within the first two years; a timeframe when, according to the Small Business Administration, roughly 56% of all new businesses fail.

Martin had the marketing chops to pull off a successful food venture. She had learned a lot about things like break-even analysis, competitive data, marketing best practices, business plans, distribution, store layout, mass production, and promotions. But when it came to starting her own business, she took all of that marketing savvy that she learned from the best of the food industry giants and threw it all out the window. There was no cookie-cutter business plan for this cookie entrepreneur. No “cost per sale” or “break even” data. Not even an idea jotted down on the back of a chocolate-chip-soiled napkin.

“We just planned to start a cookie delivery business and deliver the cookies within a 20-mile radius of Saugatuck (Michigan, where Franny and her husband live), Franny shrugged matter-of-factly. “The rest we hadn’t thought about.”

Franny just had a vision, passion, guts -- and a strong reason why she needed to make the change.

How She Did It: From ideation to setup to the first sale.

It’s one thing to come up with an idea for a business; it’s quite another to execute that idea into a profitable operation. But Franny has managed to turn a little in-home kitchen enterprise that sold a few dozen cookies to locals into a large storefront operation that sells over 3,000 cookies per day internationally! (And it’s *really* something to try to do it without a business plan!)

“How’d you do it?” I asked.

“I got right to work,” she said flatly. “I didn’t over think it, or solicit advice or opinions, or do a market survey and waste months doing a break-even analysis. I just got right to work.”

Between that Friday when she quit her job and that next Monday, Franny set up shop and jumped right in. Never mind that she wasn’t sure there would be water in the pool.

What she did do was assess her immediate startup cost: \$200 for chocolate. The other “raw materials” – eggs, sugar, and flour – paled in comparison.

“The big expense was the chocolate. We jumped in the car, drove to a store, and bought 24 bars of Ghirardelli chocolate. I’ll never forget: we stopped for lunch and I took the chocolate into the restaurant so it wouldn’t melt in the car!”

“You mean you only invested \$200 of your own money into the business? I asked, more than a little surprised.”

“That’s right”

“Oh, come on. You had to invest something in marketing and promotions.”

“Just my own work and the cost of the materials, which wasn’t much more than buying some office supplies.”

That surprised me. You would think that her experience in multi-national, big-name corporations, as well as her well-honed business instincts, would have sent her straight to venture capital funding – or at the very least a bank loan. After all, ask almost any MBA worth her salt, and she’ll tell you the way to create a viable business is to first write a detailed, in-depth business plan, pitch it to investors, land initial funding, then spend every last penny of that funding on heavyweights in marketing, PR, packaging, signage, raw materials, distribution, and a storefront. Everyone tells you – especially if you’re over a certain age – not to risk your savings or retirement on a business that has a better chance of failing than succeeding.

But Franny knew that in the “real world” for most budding entrepreneurs -- the world of small and cash-strapped mom-and-pop startups -- the rules are different. You don’t spend money you don’t have. Instead, you create your own cash flow.

Martin didn’t seek out a penny of outside funding. She didn’t risk her savings. She launched Cookies on Call without a PR firm, without an ad agency, even without a freelancer. She relied on sweat equity, instinct, and cost control. Rather than turn to outside experts, she sat down in front of her computer and designed her own logo, stickers, and ingredients labels that would go onto the corrugated boxes she found that could hold up to a dozen cookies. Her marketing brochure was self-designed and printed on her home computer. Martin and her husband, Jim, circulated the brochures to local businesses and took orders over the phone and the Internet.

Early Growth and Sleepless Nights

Eventually Franny outgrew her home kitchen (and also needed to comply with food preparation regulations). She needed a better stove and more space. But she couldn’t afford to open a storefront or buy her own commercial kitchen. So Franny went to a local elementary school and asked if she could rent their kitchen. She baked her cookies there in the early morning hours long before the school cooks arrived to prepare the daily lunch menu.

“That worked for a very long time, until they raised the rent to such a high rate that it became more cost effective for me to open my own storefront and finance my own commercial kitchen. But by that time, I had enough business and could afford to do so.

As orders slowly increased, Franny finally felt she could splurge on a couple of big expenses: \$6,000 for a new kitchen stove, and new Kitchen Aide mixer.

“Back then I was so pleased that my new convection oven could bake 24 cookies every 13 minutes,” Franny laughs. “Now we bake 120 cookies every 13 minutes, and we bake a batch every 15 minutes. We’re usually sold out several times per day, and there are always people waiting in the parking lot when we open in the morning.”

While Franny’s story may so far seem like a dream, she remembers some sleepless nights.

“I was in the hole for awhile because I was paying a monthly credit card fee, but I didn’t have enough customers to cover the fee. And I would lie awake at night and think, ‘Is this going to work?’ Finally I just told myself, ‘You can’t think that way. It *has* to work and it *will!*’”

And it did. Eventually. But not before pushing through a few more barriers.

One obstacle was the physical limitations of a 60-year-old body.

“When you have five dozen cookies on a tray, they’re heavy! All of a sudden my back started hurting so much. It’s because I wasn’t lifting properly and, of course, because I’m not as young as I used to be,” she laughs. “But once I was shown how to lift the right way, I was fine.”

One obstacle Franny didn’t expect was the loss of her support network. Some of her friends just couldn’t handle Franny’s success.

“People kept saying, ‘Well, you’re going into the cookie business. Do you think you can make a living at it?’ They would almost snicker,” Franny recalls.” And eventually, most of her former friends started to snub her.

“It’s just the cost of following your dreams,” she sighs, “but you just move on.”

That intrigued me. Many of the people I interviewed for this book told me that they often lost friends once they decided to follow their passions. What was puzzling to me in Franny’s case was that her friends weren’t jealous of her when she had the high-powered, high-paying corporate jobs (even though many of them didn’t have such high-prestige positions); yet when she swapped

the suit for the apron and abandoned the financial security of a steady job, many of her friends found her intimidating on some level.

I'm not a psychologist or therapist, but I have listened to hundreds of stories of in my career as a writer, journalist, and researcher. And I think that intimidation or jealousy is really just a fear and a clue: a fear that our own lives are slipping away from us, and a clue as to where our passions lay. Whenever someone else takes the plunge and goes for his or her real dream, real passion, it focuses a big spotlight on our own life. If we feel as if we are living the life we were meant to, then that spotlight doesn't bother us and jealousy can't possibly rear its head when we hear of someone else's success. If we're confident in our own abilities, envy can't invade our consciousness. But if we have this nagging feeling that we are stuck in a dead-end job, or that we aren't pursuing our passion, then that spotlight becomes the glare of our own disapproving psyche telling us we're a fraud. The "all-is-well-with-my-life" façade fades, and we're either forced to fess up that we're not living the life we could be, or we push those feelings of failure and inadequacy so far down into our consciousness that we're not even aware what's wrong; we just know we don't like it when someone else succeeds.

I don't mean to turn this into a lecture about jealousy. On the contrary: my point is that jealousy can be a valuable tool to find your passion. Pay attention to what and whom you are jealous of. Jealousy is nothing more than a realization that something inside of you isn't complete. If you're jealous of someone who starts her own business, then maybe your unmet passion is to start a business of your own. If you're jealous of a cartoonist, then maybe you need to look into becoming an illustrator.

It never occurred to me that jealousy could help someone uncover his or her passion until it happened to me. I spent several years as a television news anchor and reporter and – although I

liked my job – I was always somehow envious of the print reporters and documentary producers: “*They* get to write longer, more meaningful stories,” I thought. “*They* get to tell stories using narrative non-fiction – not just doing an inverted-pyramid fact-dump! *They* really get to delve into the social woes that plague our nation. *They make a difference* in the world. *Harrumph!* Must be nice! How’d *they* land that gig?”

My inner green-eyed monster was trying to tell me something. But I wasn’t getting it. It wasn’t until 15 years later--when a business colleague practically demanded that I write a social science book based on my research into behavioral psychology and anthropology--that something finally clicked. I finally started writing professionally again. And I finally felt complete again.

In the process of writing that book and landing an agent and publisher, jealousy of other writers turned to admiration and respect. Instead of being envious of them, I found myself cheering on other writers, asking them how I could help promote their books to my client base, having lunch with them, inviting them into my LinkedIn network. I started taking writing classes in literary non-fiction to complement my broadcast journalism education and experience. For the first time in my life, I felt as if I belonged; I was no longer standing on the outside with my face pressed up against the window wondering why *they* got to be *in there*, while *I* was *out here*.

Clearly, identifying your passion and, more important, having the courage to take *action* on your passion, are the first steps to undertake a major life change such as becoming an entrepreneur. A lot of people, when they heard I was writing a book on how to start a passion-driven business later in life, asked me how to find their passion. Some wanted to know where to look. Others wanted to know how to look. Still others wanted to know what distinguishes a vagary

from a vocation. I asked every person I interviewed for this book how they identified their passions. Franny had one of the most simple, yet most powerful answers:

“I just thought, ‘What do I do when my job stresses me out? And the answer was, I’d always come home and bake.’”

Franny baked a lot in her corporate days.

“I always had a fear of speaking in public, but that was a big part of my job. To relax, I’d bake and would run through the speech in my head. I’d be totally relaxed by the time I had to give the speech.”

“How many batches did you have to bake to relax?”

“Depended on the importance of the speech, “ Franny laughed”, but usually after the first batch I’d be relaxed.”

Like the roots of a plant that naturally gravitate toward water, we humans gravitate toward what is naturally, organically good for us and what feeds our soul. Franny was drawn to baking to relieve stress. That was a big clue to where her passion lay. When she quit her corporate job, she hadn’t spent years contemplating “what is my purpose” or pondering “what’s the meaning of my life” or “what type of business would make the most money the fastest?” She didn’t search for her passion. In that brief instant when her husband Jim asked what she thought she might want to do for the rest of her life, it was a casual, top-of-the-head response. But it was spot-on. She looked to what she found relaxing, enjoyable and engaging – and what others had already said was a talent of hers: baking cookies.

Franny’s Big Break

Every summer thousands of tourists flock to what is known as “The Art Coast of Michigan” -- a tiny resort town called Saugatuck -- and roam up and down Water Street. It’s known for its quaint art galleries, art studios, numerous art fairs, museums, and restaurants. But for one day every August, local restaurateurs take over Water Street to show off their culinary creations at Taste of Saugatuck. It was there that Franny decided to showcase what she calls her “little objects of beauty.”

“My biggest fear was that no one would buy them and we’d have to take the cookies to the fire station and give them away,” Franny chuckles.

But there was no need to worry: Two-hundred ten of her chocolate chunk cookies sold within the first 45-minutes of the Taste of Saugatuck; 1400 sold between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. on the day of the Taste. That was the big jump-off for Franny’s business. *Cookies on Call* went from a small startup to a tourist destination for Saugatuck virtually overnight.

“People now come to town just for our cookies. We have one guy who comes in from Chicago early in the morning, picks up a few dozen, and drives back to Chicago to take them to the office.”

The Business Today

Cookies on Call -- the little business that started with a goal of selling to customers within a 20-mile radius of Saugatuck, Michigan -- now receives orders online from customers as far away as Houston and Switzerland! The business is 18% ahead of profits from a year ago, and Franny just opened a new, larger store in nearby downtown Douglas, Michigan, where she sells 49 different varieties of cookies. Seven years after starting the business in her kitchen, she’s already found someone interested in buying it: one of her employees.

“I was just so thrilled that she took such an interest in the business,” Franny gushed. “She’s a college student and one day I asked her what she wanted to do with her life and she said, ‘*This!* I want to own a business just like *this!*’ So, I’m grooming her to do just that and, when the time is right, I’ll hand over the reigns to her. I even let her pick out the paint color for the new store – and that was huge for me!”

But until that day, Franny continues to run the business – and to make mistakes right along with good decisions. She says every day is a learning experience, but for the most part, it’s been a smooth ride.

“I’ve made a few bad hiring decisions,” she says. “And my first Christmas I made 5,000 cookies” without a plan for distribution. “He (her husband Jim) had to deliver a lot of those cookies” in a short time frame.

The business has come a long way since that hope-filled Saturday morning several years ago when Franny and her husband drove over 30 miles to buy 24 bars of chocolate to make that first entrepreneurial batch of cookies. Now, they now load up 55-pound *cases* of chocolate. And instead of using a kitchen knife to break up the chocolate bars, Franny uses a mallet and a five-pound ice chopper to smash the sweet confection into chunks small enough for cookies.

I always like to ask late-life start-up entrepreneurs if they regret not having started their business earlier. When I asked Franny, “Do you wish you would have done this sooner?” she was quick with a reply.

“Absolutely not! I wouldn’t have appreciated it and I would have screwed it up!” She went on to explain that because of her business background, if she had tried to start the business in her younger years, she would have gone into it trying to figure out how to make it, build it, sell it; not how to nurture it.

“There’s a way a cookie sounds when it’s rolled properly,” Franny says as her eyes light up and her energy increases. “I wish everybody could feel as good as I do when I hear that perfect ‘snap’ sound of a perfectly-rolled cookie! That’s what I focus on now—quality of the product.”

And that’s the biggest difference between her business now, and one that she might have started in her younger years.

“I have more respect for the product than I would have earlier, and I’m not so focused on the marketing plan, the numbers, the business stuff. I’m so thrilled when people take a bite out of that cookie and say it’s the best cookie they’ve ever had! *That’s* what motivates me – and the sound of a perfectly-rolled cookie -- not the mundane business stuff, or trying to prove that I’m a super smart business tycoon. Once you reach mid-life, you really don’t have to prove anything to anyone, and that’s very liberating.”

The biggest benefit is what her passion for making the perfect cookie has brought to her life. She was able to take the time to spend with her friend and her dad until they passed away. And she found a part of herself along the way, too. Even though she had always been happy in her various jobs, Franny always felt as if something was missing; she always seemed to be searching for something. Her dad summed it up best when he took a bite of a cookie from her first batch as an entrepreneur: “She’s finally got it. This is it what she was meant to do. Her search is over.”

Rear-View Reflections

Franny’s single piece of advice to late bloomer entrepreneurs: Embrace who you are and the journey that got you to this point. There are no mistakes, no lost opportunities, no “wasted” years. Everything that you’ve done throughout your life – even if it was in a job that made you miserable – served a purpose to prepare you for a new, better journey in late life.

Insights and Advice from the Franny Martin story

KEY INSIGHT: Forget what you learned in the “real world.”

A lot of people tell me their real passion is to start a business of their own. But they have problems: They can't get venture capital funding and there are no angel investors; they can't afford to hire good people; they don't have a distribution system; they don't have a storefront; they don't have a business plan.

Anyone who has spent any length of time working in the “real” world is conditioned to think that there are certain things you absolutely need to start a business. Bootstrapping is never discussed in the conference rooms of corporate America, or in the halls of business schools. But less than one percent of all startups get venture capital funding. Franny's story is a great example of how common sense and bootstrapping can result in faster business growth. If you really want to start a business, just do it. Most businesses are started with \$20,000 or less. Many do it for under \$5,000. Dell and launched with \$1,000; the late John Johnson -- publisher of Ebony and Jet magazines -- started with a \$500 loan from his mom; Fred DeLuca founded Subway Sandwiches with a \$1,000 loan form a family friend. A thousand bucks can launch a global empire.

There are other benefits to bootstrapping. One is that you can start your business right away. The process of securing outside funding can take up to a year. By that time, the market could have changed, someone else could have filled your niche, or you could lose interest because you've gotten bogged down with all the paperwork of the funding process.

Bootstrapped businesses often are the most successful over the long haul. Why? The main reason is because it forces an entrepreneur to create a business based on reality

– not appearances. When you don't have a lot of external cash, you're forced to address the immediate needs of customers the moment you open your doors. You grow the business as you get more customers, which keeps the growth rate steady. And when you bootstrap, you're forced to get out and sell – whether you like to or not. Finally, bootstrappers waste far less cash than companies that get boatloads of external funding because, after all, if there's no money, there's nothing to waste; you have to make every dollar count.

Other insights

Answer the “why” not the “what.”

Franny's story is one that clearly demonstrates when you have a compelling “why,” the “how” and “what” will present themselves. So often people come up to me and ask, “How do I figure out what my next career move should be” or “What do I have to do to find my passion?” The better questions might be: “*Why* do you want to change careers? *Why* do I want to move in a different direction? Reasons motivate; the “how's” and “what's” are merely tactical questions of secondary importance.

Pay attention to what you turn to for stress relief.

Can't figure out what your passion is? Look to what you do when you're stressed. There could be some good clues there as to what really excites you. Franny turned to baking to relieve stress. Although I didn't realize it until more than a decade had passed, during my years as a corporate consultant I often took the stressful events of my life and wrote “based-on-a-true-story” narratives. Escaping into a story was my tonic. Why I didn't sell those stories and become a freelancer still escapes me. Perhaps I wasn't ready. Perhaps I

was too deafened by the self-actualization hype fed to me by clients to hear my own inner voice. Or perhaps I was simply too afraid to take the plunge. Had I paid attention to what gave me joy when I was stressed, it would have been a no-brainer to start a writing career sooner. But, as Franny says, “there are no wasted years.”

Pay attention to what and whom you are jealous of.

Jealousy is a sign that something is missing in your own life. Who are you most envious of? Who you envy is often a clue to the type of job or career you would like to be in. Rarely are people jealous of someone else’s money; it’s often what that money represents: the success (defined differently by each person) that is missing in our own lives, or the feeling that we have missed our own boat.

Don’t believe the hype of the “high prestige” jobs.

This is a different take on the old saying, “Don’t believe your own PR.” Don’t get caught up in the trappings of the big paycheck, the corner office, or the glamour of globe-trotting. Those are all just window dressing. Look at what’s at your foundation, because that’s the only thing that you truly own and is the source of your deepest happiness and fulfillment. And don’t confuse rungs on the corporate ladder with self-actualization. True self-actualization only happens when you feel joy in what you are doing.

The Entrepreneurial Late Bloomer: Are you one?

Franny is the typical ‘entrepreneurial’ late bloomer: someone who has a burning passion to start a business of his or her own in mid life. Are you an entrepreneurial late bloomer? Look at

the checklist below. If you answer “yes” to at least 12 of the 15 questions, then there’s a good chance you’re ready to hang out your own shingle.

The questions below are designed to see if you have a high chance of being *successful* as a self-employed person.

1. YES NO You have a craft or talent that you love and that comes easily to you.
2. YES NO You often worked at your craft or talent while working full time at your “real” job, or at least you have some training or experience in the industry where you plan to start a business.
3. YES NO You are in good physical health.
4. YES NO You are in good mental health.
5. YES NO You would work long hours, seven days a week, if necessary, to start your business and keep in running.
6. YES NO You enjoy making decisions *all* of the time.
7. YES NO You are a person who takes the initiative to start things – and doesn’t just talk about them.
8. YES NO You have at least \$25,000 in savings that you could contribute to the startup of the business, or you have a strong bootstrapping plan.
9. YES NO You like change, and can adapt quickly to it.
10. YES NO You are good at both, short term and long-range planning.
11. YES NO You don’t like to take big risks, but you are willing to take *reasonable*, and well-thought-out risks.
12. YES NO You have strong people skills and enjoy interacting with others.
13. YES NO You not only initiate ideas, but you have fantastic follow-through.

14. YES NO You have a good credit rating.

15. YES NO You are willing to see your income decrease – most likely substantially –
for the first two years you are in business.

Don't worry if you didn't answer "yes" to all of them. In the coming chapters, you'll find examples of entrepreneurs who didn't have some of these attributes, but were able to overcome the odds anyway. They'll show you how through their stories.

CHAPTER SIX

If You Can't Get a Job in the Industry You Want, Then Become a Player in the Industry.

From Nike corporate executive to movie actor and TV host: The Story of Anthony Smith.

“Look at me!” the voice demanded. “I’ll ask it *again*: WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?”

The drill-sergeant-like man pounded his fist on the counter, leaned in closer, teeth clenched, eyes glaring.

“I suppose...I’ll... try to...get a job... as an actor,” the meek little voice replied.

“*What’s that?! I didn’t HEAR you!*” the voice barked.

“I AM GOING TO GET A JOB AS AN ACTOR!”

“Oh-KAY then.” The man straightened up, took a deep breath, and gave a nod of approval.

Anthony Smith would look into the mirror every morning for almost a year and a half and have that same conversation with the two sides himself. No, he wasn’t suffering from a split personality disorder. But he was definitely grappling with two conflicting internal identities. First, there was Mr. Corporate, who was like an amiable old friend: never challenging authority, always doing what was best for the company, comfortable in his own skin, and never rocking the boat. Mr. Corporate defined Anthony for the past 20 years. But now there was a new kid in town: Mr. Performer. He was restless and itching to break free of the confines of a corporate culture,

and demanded that Anthony cut all ties with Mr. Corporate to break out and become the actor he now longed to be.

“Those conversations were the only way I could connect with the emotions and keep myself on track. Fortunately, I live alone so no one was there to make fun of me as I alternately talked and yelled at myself in the mirror,” Anthony chuckles.

At age 52, Mr. Corporate had achieved the brass ring: a top-level marketing executive position for one of the largest athletic wear companies in the world. He lived in Germany for ten years, Holland for two years, and Italy for nine, working at various corporate divisions of Nike. He rubbed elbows with some of the most famous athletes in the world. His bosses regularly promoted him and gave him the plum assignments. His co-workers liked to play basketball with him and go out for the occasional after-work drinks. He had what most would consider a “dream” life.

But a few years earlier, in his late 40s, Mr. Corporate got introduced to Mr. Performer: Anthony was asked by his company to host a series of TV shows where he interviewed celebrities as part of a product promotion for Nike.

That’s when Mr. Corporate started to have an identity crisis. *I don’t think I want to work in corporate America anymore. I want to be a motivational speaker, I want to act and host TV shows and perform! I want to express my personality and creativity. I don’t want to be a suit!*

What started out as a little voice in Mr. Corporate’s head grew into a full-blown persona of its own. Mr. Performer slowly started to take over, and eventually lost all respect for Mr. Corporate. It was time to take the leap.

Problem was, no one wanted to hire a 52-year-old corporate V.P. with no speaking or acting experience to speak and act. Oh, he applied to several places. He had tried for a couple of

years to break into the performance field and get full time work. He applied everywhere from local theater companies to New York modeling and acting agencies. Some gave him a polite, “Thank-you-for-you-interest” response. Others sent the obligatory form rejection letter.

Some laughed in his face.

That’s when Anthony had an epiphany: If you can’t *get hired* in the industry, become a *player* in the industry.

“Look, at a certain age, you’re not going to get hired in certain industries—especially if you don’t have direct experience”, Anthony told me as he sat perched on a chair in his home office in Italy. “That’s just the way it is. So, if you can’t get a job, the only thing you can do is to create your own job. That means entrepreneurship. So created my own performance and entertainment company, which got me the acting gigs.”

“So you didn’t go the ‘struggling actor’ route and work as a waiter?” I asked.

“No! Getting a full time job is the *worst* thing you can do if you want to become an actor.”

“But you have to support yourself. I know you have a son to support, too. You can’t just go to auditions full time--unless you have a rich uncle that you haven’t told me about.”

“No. No rich uncle,” Anthony laughed. “I’m not saying that you shouldn’t get full time *work*. I’m saying you shouldn’t get a full time *job*.”

I thought he was just playing with semantics, so I challenged him.

“But if you get full time work, by definition, don’t you have a full-time job—even if you do create the so-called job yourself?”

“Not at all. Think about what happens when you get a full time job to support a passion. You’re working full time and you don’t have time to pursue the passion. You have no flexibility. You have to put in your face time at the office every day.”

He had a point. I had some friends who tried for years to become actors. Every one of them held down full time jobs, but not one of them could ever get off work to go to auditions.

“Okay. But even if you work for yourself, you have obligation to clients and client schedules. You can’t just take off when you want to go to an audition.”

“You can if you create the *right* job for yourself!”

Anthony told me that the key is to create a job that will require little effort, have a big payout so you can fund your passion, and – most importantly -- give you time flexibility. *Yeah, right*, I thought. *It sounds like a pitch from a typical late-night infomercial get-rich-quick scheme*. But I later learned that Anthony is genuine. He’s not into getting rich; he’s into creating a rich life.

The first thing he did once he finally garnered the courage to quit his “real” job was to figure out what kind of business he could create for himself that would (a) brand him as an acting talent, (b) allow him to do the performance work he loved, (c) get paid well to do it, and (d) give him complete scheduling flexibility, and (e) allow him “geographic flexibility”: he wanted to be close to his son, living in Italy with Anthony’s ex-wife, yet be able to make frequent trips to New York City for acting auditions.

That seemed like a pretty tall order. Most would have given up, thinking it would be impossible to create any kind of business that could meet those stringent standards. But Anthony doesn’t believe in allowing any type of barrier to become an excuse for inaction.

“Not making it work was never an option,” Anthony told me. “The only insurmountable barriers are those we put up in our own minds.”

“Now you sound like Tony Robbins.”

“I know it sounds trite, and it’s been said a hundred times before, but it’s so true!” Tony (Smith) insisted. And he proved it.

After puttering around with a few ideas and passing them through his five criteria filters, Anthony started Jolten-- what he calls an “educational event and entertainment company”-- in Italy. Like most of the people in this book who have started businesses after leaving corporate America, Anthony, too, started his on a shoestring. He set up shop out of his home with the basics: phone, fax (yes, people *do* still use those), Internet connection, and copy machine. His marketing plan was simple, but not easy: He pounded the pavement, knocked on doors, made phone calls, and networked constantly. Soon, he had regular entertainment gigs at large corporations, where he performed skits about leadership, sales, success, and team work that he learned during his years at Nike and, earlier, Levi Strauss.

He also found a way to create a constant need for his acting talent: produce mini-dramas and mini-comedies around the training needs of companies. He would go into an organization, find out what its main training needs were, then go home and write a half-hour sitcom or drama (depending on the training topic) around the learning points that managers said employees needed to retain. He and other actors acted out the story, recorded them on video, then produced and edited the videos. In essence, Anthony created a job for himself as a writer, producer *and* actor and got paid well to do it!

“I only work three days per week, and I make as much as many people do working 40, 50, 60 hours per week,” Anthony told me. “And I wouldn’t want to work more. That’s all the

money I need to live on, to support my son, to pay for ongoing acting classes, and to make regular trips back to New York for auditions.”

Anthony has created the perfect lifestyle for himself. His educational/ entertainment company pays the bills so he can pursue his passion. But what about that passion? Just how much acting is he doing? And what about the TV hosting gigs? How many of those does he get?

At last count, he’s been hired as an extra in over 30 U.S. movies, had a starring role in one Italian-produced movie (he’s fluent in several languages), has done countless commercials, and hosts his own motivational TV show – in addition to his edu-tainment comedies and dramas. And he started a second motivational business.

“I know exactly when I came up with the idea to start my own little motivational TV segments. It was 7 a.m. in Brooklyn New York on the set of a movie I was working acting in.”

As he was sitting there with the other actors waiting for his scene, Karen, a 24-year-old model who was trying to break into acting struck up a conversation with Anthony. “How did you get into acting? How do you support yourself while still trying to go to auditions? I want to move to New York with my girlfriend and pursue acting, but I have no idea how to do it. Do you know how I could make it work? What books do you recommend? Do you know any websites?”

Karen rapid-fired questions to Anthony all day during breaks in filming. After Anthony responded to them one by one throughout the day on the movie set, Karen gave him a great big hug and told him he had been a lifesaver for her.

“She just came running up to me and threw her arms around me and said, ‘You just made it possible for me to realize my dream. And I don’t have to go broke to do it.’ That was pretty

cool., “Anthony recalled. “And it got me thinking: What if I start a web site, do regular TV segments, and have articles, links to resources, and all kinds of other information that will help actors who are just starting out? I know I sure wish I would have had that when I first started in this business!”

Thus was born ActingCareerStartup.com, a free site that dishes out acting advice. A big part of the site is giving in-depth teleseminars on how to create a well-paying, work-from-home job that will allow actors the time, money, and flexibility to go on acting auditions. He also offers tips on the more tactical elements of acting: how to audition, how to do headshots, how to make an audition tape, and so on.

Anthony’s web TV spots also got him a few TV hosting jobs on Italian television. In just five short years after leaving Mr. Corporate behind, Mr. Performer has achieved his goals: regular acting gigs, a livable income, TV hosting jobs, and motivational coaching and speaking through ActingCareerStartup.com.

“Do you ever miss that guy in the mirror who feared leaving the security of a corporate job?” I asked.

“Not ever. That guy wasn’t real to me. This guy is.”

Rest in peace, Mr. Corporate.

Rear-View Reflections: *Excitement vs. Passion*

“What’s the most valuable thing you knew at age 50 that you didn’t know when you were younger?” I asked Anthony as we closed out our interview.

“Don’t confuse excitement with passion,” he told me.

Like many of us, Anthony got caught up on the excitement of new jobs, new titles, and new experiences. When we're in our 20s and 30s, we often look for the next cool thing, the next hot job, the next shower of kudos. We're more ego driven than soul driven. And for most of us, it's not until our late 40s or 50s that we finally discover who we really are and what our deepest, undeniable soul urge is. We may have more surface-level *excitement* when we're younger, but we definitely have a deeper *passion* later in life. That is, *if* we pay attention to our inner yearnings and act on those signs.

Insights and Advice from the Anthony Smith Story

Insight #1: Don't let yourself get away with excuses for not pursuing your passion.

A lot of times my clients who say they want to pursue an artistic passion talk themselves out of it. It's too hard. There's no work. It's too competitive. The pay is low. I'll starve. They give a dozen excuses.

Anthony found there are no excuses, only creative solutions.

Acting has to be one of the toughest businesses in which to find work. Anthony knew that. So rather than go the traditional route of hoping to land a big role through auditions (and probably landing in the poor house in the process), he created a marketable need for his acting talent through the edu-tainment shows.

How can you create a marketable need for your artwork, music, or performance talent? What do companies or consumers need that you could provide with a new, artistic twist?

Insight #2: Don't get a full-time job to fund a passion.

Anthony says getting a full-time job to fund a passion is just a way to subconsciously sidestep your passion. "It's not a straight line to a goal" he says. Rather, he recommends one of two routes: (1) Creating your own job within the industry that you want to be in (such as his educational entertainment business), or (2) Create a *system* that creates income, not just a job. What is a system? Passive income. Anthony recently started selling everything his own information products (books, articles, and CDs) to create a passive income stream. Is that directly related to acting? No. But it gives him an impressive passive income that allows him to pay for and go to acting classes and auditions. Others he has coached through his acting advice web site found passive income opportunities by selling products on e-Bay, becoming affiliates partners for various web sites (not multi-level marketing schemes), or selling other people's books, tapes, and CDs.

Insight #3: Develop filters that every decision you make will be passed through. If taking a traditional full-time job gets you off track, developing strict criteria to pass every decision you make through will keep you on track to achieve your passion. You'll remember that Anthony's criteria involved things like geographic flexibility, scheduling flexibility, and a position that would brand him as an actor.

What are your criteria? Write down a list of at least three, but preferably five or six. When I first started to switch from strictly consulting to include more writing, my five criteria for taking any writing assignment included: (1) It must advance my writing skills in some way; (2) It must be only topics that I am enthusiastic about, (3) It must be something I would be

proud to put in a portfolio, (4) It must relate to my area of expertise, (5) It must be in a narrative writing style – not an inverted pyramid “fact-dump” style, (6) It must be at a professional rate – no freebies or “do-this-gig-first-and-if-we-like-it-we’ll-hire-you.” If I would get a request from an editor to do a “quick, straight-news piece” about the political strategies of the various presidential candidates, I knew I would turn it down: it didn’t match my #4 or #5 criteria. Having a clear list of filters to run any opportunity through will keep you focused.

The Artistic Entrepreneur: Are You One?

People who want to pursue art in their later years have perhaps the most difficult road. We’re conditioned to believe that actors, musicians, painters, writers, and comedians are destined for poverty and struggle. We also believe—incorrectly--that only those with fat retirement funds can afford to pursue mid-life artistic paths. But Anthony’s story shows us that if you’re creative, and most artists are, then you can find a way to make it work. (Sue Smith, who you’ll meet in Chapter 10, was in her late 50s, bankrupt, and responsible for her daughters’ college tuition, yet she, too, still found a way to make a good living as a painter.)

Are you an artistic entrepreneur? Answer the questions below to find out. If you answer “yes” to eight or more, there’s a good chance an inner artist is trying to break out.

1. YES NO Did you like to draw, paint, show off, write, or sing as a young child ?
2. YES NO Have people (other than your family) told you that you have a talent for one of the arts?

3. YES NO Is it more important to you that your work (painting, music, sculpture, writing, acting) provoke a reaction than get a positive response? (In other words, does criticism about your work roll off your back?)

4. YES NO Are you more comfortable with subjectivity than objectivity?

5. YES NO Do you find yourself observing simple things in ways that are vastly different from how most people view the same things? (For example, someone will look at a mountain and see a mountain; you see a setting for a romance novel.)

6. YES NO Do you work diligently on a piece for days on end, only to tear it up (or throw it away, or break the pottery) and start over because you think you can do it better?

7. YES NO Do you have an active imagination?

8. YES NO Can you lose yourself for hours when working on your craft?

9. YES NO Do you consider yourself a craftsman rather than a technician?

10. YES NO Is your art a compulsion – something you *must* do?

11. YES NO Are you so passionate about your art that you have inspired others to join the art world?

12. YES NO Do you believe that anyone with talent can make a living doing art, as long as he or she is willing to work hard?