

Now may be the time for an encore career

By Betty Hechtman

They're called second acts, encore careers or reinventing yourself – they're the completely new and different jobs people take in midlife or later.

Today, making that jump is more likely to be a matter of following the heart than it was during the throes of the economic recession, when professionals caught up in corporate layoffs discovered they were too old to find jobs in a poor market and too young to retire. They started second careers not to follow a vocation but to pay the bills.

I'm glad to see the tide turning again – especially for all the baby boomers who don't want to retire but do want to do something gratifying.

I have had a lot of practice reinventing herself. I have volunteered as a farmworker on a kibbutz in Israel, waitressed and worked in retail sales, and made connections as a telephone operator, among a host of jobs.

I've held jobs just for the paycheck and I've pursued my passions, so I know how profoundly different it is to do one versus the other. No matter what age you are, if there's work you feel called to, you should most definitely give it a try – you may well experience a joy unlike any you've ever known.

Here are tips for people considering an encore:

- Do your homework. There's nothing more disappointing than jumping into something new only to become disillusioned and frustrated because you didn't take the time to prepare. If your dream is to open a particular business, research the

market. Is there a demand for what you hope to sell? Should you give it a trial run as an online business before investing in shop space and other overhead? Start by checking the resources at Score.org, a nonprofit supported by more than 12,000 volunteers dedicated to helping small businesses off the ground. For other encore pursuits, you might take classes or spend a few hours a week working as a volunteer to learn the ropes.

- Join a group of like-minded people. This is particularly helpful for aspiring artists who want to paint, play music, write a book or indulge some other creative talent. You can brush up on your skills and make valuable contacts by becoming a part of a community theater, joining a writers circle, or finding a group of hobbyists. You may find your skills develop much more quickly with the support and guidance of collegial peers who are all helping one another achieve a dream.

- Consider working in one of the five most popular encore fields. Most people seek second their careers in health, education, government, environment and non-profits – all fields expected to provide abundant job opportunities in the next couple of years, according to Encore.org, a non-profit that supports second careers “for the greater good.” If you need training to qualify, now is the time to get it. Invest now in the education, and you can soon have a job that feeds the heart, the mind – and the body.

Betty Hechtman is the author of “Yarn to Go,” the first book in the Berkley Prime Crime Yarn Retreat mystery series, as well as the author of the best-selling Berkley Prime Crime Crochet mystery series. The eighth book, “For Better or Worsted,” comes out in November.