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New year, new career

Many of us decide to turn over a new leaf for the New Year, but for some brave souls it presents an opportunity to change their whole career and lifestyle – here's how one reader did it, and how you can do it too

WORDS Jon Cope

Helen Knox-Johnston, 30, worked for seven years to become a TV researcher, but having finally achieved her goal, she found she hated it. Eventually she ditched her chosen industry and set up a yoga business.

'Researching for television was always my dream job, but it turned out to be a nightmare. For every brilliant, creative person in the industry there were two complete crackpots determined to further their careers at the expense of my sanity. The stress, worry and frequent boredom quickly became unbearable, but I stuck at it. I couldn't just give up what I'd worked so hard for.'

To wind down, Helen attended Saturday yoga classes. 'I was instantly hooked. It was the only place I could relax and "shine" – no mean feat, as I was frequently hungover, another feature of TV life!'

While practising at home, Helen fantasised about training as a yoga teacher. Then, after four and a half years working in TV, she was made redundant. She didn't hang about.

'Within a week, I'd left London for a month-long residential yoga

training course in Dorset. It was an all-absorbing, life-changing experience. Going without TV, alcohol, caffeine and my own choice of food was tough. But gradually, through the fog of tiredness and aching limbs,



I found an incredible strength and peace of mind. Yoga was definitely my calling.'

Coming back to London was tough. For the first time in years, Helen had no job, and little idea of how to start teaching. Worse, within an hour of returning, Helen's partner of four years

announced that he was moving out. 'I was heartbroken but the meditation and exercise techniques I'd learned helped me keep calm.'

Before long, the excitement and positivity she felt about teaching revitalised her. 'I tried

[NOW INSTEAD OF FEELING STRESSED AND WORN DOWN, I FEEL ALIVE, FULL OF ENERGY AND CALM]

STARTING OUT

Fancy following in Helen's inspirational footsteps? Here are some tips on starting a new career in complementary medicine

HOMEOPATHY

Even the quickest route to becoming a qualified homeopath takes time and money. A three-year, full-time course at a renowned centre such as the College of Naturopathic Medicine (www.naturopathy-uk.com) takes up three to four days a week and costs around £10,000. You'll come away well-versed in anatomy and physiology with 400 clinical hours under your belt and a range of diagnostic skills at your disposal, plus the Homeopathic Medical Association (www.the-hma.org) seal of approval.

REFLEXOLOGY

If feet are your thing, you can become a qualified reflexologist in under a year. First, you need to take a nine-month, level 3 diploma somewhere like The Central London College of Reflexology (www.reflexologyschool.co.uk). During that time you're required to carry out 100 hours of supervised practice, followed by around another 100 hours on your own. Provided you pass your exams at the end and pay for insurance through the Association of Reflexologists (www.aor.org.uk), you're then qualified to work for the NHS or as a private practitioner.

NUTRITIONAL THERAPY

Considered relatively orthodox, the most comprehensive training for nutritional therapy is a three-year, full-time university degree accredited by the British Association for Nutritional Therapy (www.bant.org.uk) or the Nutritional Therapy Council (www.nutritionaltherapycouncil.org.uk), such as those available from the Centre for Nutrition, Education and Lifestyle Management (www.cnelm.co.uk). If you lack A-level chemistry and human biology, you'll require an access course first. After graduating, you should join a professional body before starting to practise. The cost of degree-level courses varies between £3,000 and £4,500.



AROMATHERAPY MASSAGE

To get started in aromatherapy massage, you first need to master the massage part. A diploma in holistic massage that's ratified by the International Therapy Examination Council (www.itecworld.co.uk) is fine. Next come the oils: an organisation such as Essentials for Health (www.essentialforhealth.co.uk) will put you through your paces with an International Federation of Aromatherapists-approved 14-month course. (Classes are held every third weekend.) Once you've passed exams in both courses, you're eligible to set up in practice, and all for £3,205, although most successful therapists also offer a range of other treatments, such as hot stones and Indian head massage.

REIKI

Without previous experience, you can learn reiki in just two days for around £300. For more information, visit www.thehealingco.com. To practise, you must apply to a reiki association such as the Reiki Healers & Teachers Society (www.reikihealersandteachers.net). You must then get practitioner's insurance and undertake two years' probationary practice before becoming a full member of the association – then you're off! *You can practise most alternative health disciplines at home, or at a client's home or offices. As your confidence and client list grows, you can consider hiring space within an alternative health centre or, in some cases, working for the NHS.*

to find cheap spaces locally to take classes and spent hours designing flyers, cycling round to display them in newsagent and healthfood shop windows. Finally, a local gallery offered me a beautiful space for free!

Straightaway, Helen started teaching small classes and within a month had amassed a small but loyal following. Meanwhile, she was building a crucial network of friends in London: the tight-knit circle of yoga teachers.

'Eventually, established teachers would ask me to cover for them. I also used my TV research skills, cold-calling local gyms for teaching spots. Soon I was teaching eight classes a week while holding down a nine-to-five admin job.'

But Helen's biggest break came when she rewarded herself with a trip to Australia. 'One of the girls I met there mentioned that her yoga teacher in London wanted to sell her business. I jotted down the contact details and emailed her as soon as I got home. Two weeks later, she called and we agreed to meet. Now I've taken over her teaching space and clientele. I can hardly believe it's just 12 months since I qualified to teach yoga.'

The start-up costs of Helen's career change were relatively low – about £2,000 for initial training, plus a few pounds for publicity. Buying the business was costly, though, with rent and goodwill costing about £24,000. However, this is repayable in instalments, and Helen is confident that she will retain existing clients, as well as attracting new ones.

'Naturally, there were low points along the way – early sessions where no clients attended reduced me to tears. But the highs easily outweigh them.'

So does she have any regrets? 'No way! I'm earning a living doing something I adore that makes equal demands on my brain and body, producing an amazing feeling of balance. I feel years younger and am learning new things constantly.'

'Now, at the end of a day's work, instead of feeling stressed, worn down and unappreciated, I feel alive, full of energy and calm. The satisfaction pervades every area of my life. And I really have realised my dream.' healthy

● *Complementary Medical Association*
www.the-cma.org.uk

● *British Wheel of Yoga*
www.bwy.org.uk; 01529 306 851

● *The International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists*
www.ifparoma.org; 01455 637 987

● *To contact Helen for a yoga session, call her on 07961 154444.*