

second acts

DON'T LIKE YOUR CURRENT JOB OR LIFE?
MEET SEVEN WOMEN WHO DID SOMETHING ABOUT IT

Some women grow up knowing just what they want to do with their lives, while others need to walk a long and winding road to find the kind of work that finally feels right. Once-loved careers can lose their luster, the birth of children can cast our work lives in a new light and everyday transformations can suddenly force us to reevaluate who we are and how we want to use our gifts.

Sure, we all know women who are happily living the careers they first conceived in a sandbox, but what are the rest of us to do when the choices we once made no longer fit our lives? Luckily, as these seven women have discovered, changing lanes is a matter of taking yourself in hand, of seeing yourself in a new way and of taking a leap. Who says there are no second acts in American lives?

maida coleman, 49 >

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

ACT ONE journalist

ACT TWO state senator

Journalism was Maida Coleman's goal from childhood, but none of her college courses prepared her for how she would feel when she began work at the *St. Louis American*, a weekly paper. "Having a deadline just drove me over the top," says Maida. She was plagued by headaches that lasted all week, "then mysteriously disappeared on Friday at three o'clock."

Ending her chosen career might have been obvious, but it wasn't until the night in 1992 when a man named Ronnie White knocked on her door that she knew exactly what she should be doing. White was campaigning for state representative. "I started raging about all the problems in my community, and what I would do if I was an elected official," she says. At the time, Maida was divorced and supporting her children, John, now 32, Alaina, 24, and James, 23. White, now chief justice of Missouri's Supreme Court, urged her to become active in her local ward organization, and Maida promptly became her ward's committeewoman. In 2000 she was elected state representative, and in 2002 began to represent 160,000 in the city of St. Louis as their state senator.

"One of the reasons I decided to run was that I felt no one could represent me better than I could," says Maida. "There were so many issues of great importance that I was not seeing people use common sense on. I thought I could do that job." Maida is passionate about electoral reform, identity theft prevention and programs that benefit the poor.

And while it used to bother her that she doesn't work in the field she trained for, she recognizes that "the ability to speak, to write, to make presentations—all of those things I learned as a journalist—help me be successful in my job today. And I truly believe that I'm making a difference."

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN KERNICK



Do what makes you happy,
says Maida. If you have to,
"do without, earn less, learn
to live within your means."