

## Entrepreneur is a teacher to many

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By Sue Coffman



**Dr. Helen Harkness** is living the kind of life she counsels others to explore. At an undisclosed age – but past traditional retirement – she maintains an active professional schedule as president of Career Design Associates, Inc., which specializes in individual and organizational renewal through career and management-training

programs.

She has had many years of experience as a consultant, writer, speaker and researcher in the design and presentation of programs dealing with change, re-careering, career enhancement and retirement reduction.

The titles of her speeches, workshops and seminars point to this focus, as do her two full-length books: **The Career Chase: Taking Creative Control in a Chaotic Age**; and **Don't Stop the Career Shock: Rejecting the Myths of Aging for a New Way to Work in the 21st Century**. Her upcoming book is titled **Capitalizing on Career Chaos** (now available).

“My work is concerned with helping people find their strengths and talents and put them into the workforce,” she said. “It prepares people to identify their talents and develop strategies to achieve their potential.”

Harkness's clients are a little like the oak trees on the tree farm on her ten acres. “I grow people and I grow plants,” she said. “I have to see growth in both. I've planted and given away hundreds of trees.”

Harkness began her career by teaching English, speech, theater, psychology, history and government in public schools, then became an English professor and department chair, director of adult education, acting dean of business development, and academic dean and provost at the University of Plano in Plano, Texas, in the 1970s.

She moved on to serve as director of human resources for the Nicholson Memorial Library and as coordinator of human services, including the Office of Aging and Human Resource Development Center, for the City of Garland.

Since 1988 she has developed and taught three courses at Southern Methodist University: **Re-Careering: The Search for Meaning, Money, Creativity and Control**; **Career Options for Teachers**; and **Running from the Law** (for attorneys in career transition).

A West Virginia native, Harkness received a bachelor of science and master of arts in speech and English from West Virginia University and earned a doctorate in adult/higher education from the University of North Texas.

As a doctoral candidate at UNT in the 1970s, Harkness saw the handwriting on the wall – that there would be few opportunities for doctorates in English. That realization motivated her to gravitate into career counseling.

She moved over to the education department and wrote her dissertation on community-based career centers. “Nobody had heard about them at the time,” she said. “School is only one part of the solution. Some people who are looking to change careers need counseling from trained career counselors.”

With so many facets to her career, Harkness still considers herself primarily a teacher. “I like teaching adults,” she said. “Every client who comes in with a career problem offers a challenge. There's a lot of variety.”

**Over the years, the average age of her clients has dropped from the mid-40s-plus to the mid-30s-plus. One explanation for the change is that “we have very deep, significant change going on in our world,” she said.**

“It's the twilight zone: the end of the old way and the beginning of a new way. As a futurist I'm ahead of my time in determining what's coming. The main thing is that we have to teach people how to change.”

Harkness advises people to focus on functional age rather than chronological age, and she follows her own advice. “I will never retire or slow down,” she said. **“The best anti-aging medicine is work that you love.** Arthritis may get me, but Alzheimer's won't.”