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INSIDE

Finding that labor of love

Helen Harkness takes clients looking for a career change on journeys of the soul to find out what will feed their passions. Discover that, she says, and enjoy true success.

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Counselor helps clients find labors of love

Straight shooter's 4-step process has led thousands to passions

By CHERYL HALL
Staff Writer

Think of Helen Harkness as the Fairy Godmother of career reincarnations.

She doesn't sprinkle magic dust or wave a wand. But the septuagenarian takes clients looking for a career change on journeys of the soul to find out what will feed their passions.

Discover that, she says, and enjoy true success.

"Many executives have gotten to the top by leaving parts of themselves behind." Says Dr. Harkness, principal and president of Career Design Associates, Inc. "There's a need for growth that they're not getting from the corporate world."

Since founding her practice in 1978, Dr. Harkness has guided more than 8,000 private clients—and that doesn't include the multitude who've attended her classes and seminars on what she calls "recareering."

"I'm not saying money's not important, but there's only so much you can do with it," she says. "I have clients making more money than I'll ever see. They're saying, 'I can't do this anymore. I have squeezed everything from my life, and I don't even know what's inside of me now.'"

But there's no quick fix.

"I tell people, 'We don't leap off tall buildings,' she says, then explains her four-part process. "The first step looks inward at the real you. The second looks outward at what's going on in the real world. The third puts the first two together to decide where you want to be in a realistic future. The fourth step is, 'OK, here's what I need to do now to build toward that future.'"

She gives clients a battery of personality and proficiency tests and makes them fill 3-inch-thick binders with their innermost thoughts.

But what makes Dr. Harkness so effective, clients say, is her ability to bluntly pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses and push them toward reality-based goals. And there's simplicity in the truth she speaks.

Taking a step back

Perhaps her most famous client-turned-disciple is Todd Wagner, who made his fortune when he and Mark Cuban sold Broadcast.com to Yahoo Inc. in 1999 for nearly \$6 million. He now devotes much of his time and energy to his charitable foundation.

"It takes some chutzpah to forge a new path," he says. "Dr. Harkness instills that in people. She tells you it's OK to have those dark soul-searching moments of 'Who am I, and what is the right thing to do?'"

The 43-year-old has worked with her since his early days as a lawyer 13 years ago.

"One of her key messages—and one I fully ascribe to—is that sometimes to move forward, you have to take a step back," Mr. Wagner says. "Most people won't do that. They don't want to take a cut in salary or give up prestige."

Dr. Harkness charges a flat rate of \$3,900 for test, 40 hours of group sessions and 11 hours of one-on-one mentoring, or \$5,900 for a two-year retainer.

Besides sessions at her home office in Garland, Dr. Harkness also teaches much-cheaper, informal courses at Southern Methodist University's School of Continuing Education and at S'Cool, an adult education organization that holds classes in the area.

If Dr. Harkness appears grandmotherly at first, that impression quickly dissipates when she opens her mouth. "One of the key things you have to have in today's world is a very sharp crap detector," she says in a way that tells you hers is set on high. "There are too many old rules that simply should not be followed."

That's why she has this thing about telling her age. "If you could show me any 50-year old who does more than I do, then I'd tell you my chronological age," she says. Then she adds that she was born Feb. 29, 1928, so she's technically still a teenager, since Feb. 29 comes once every four years.

Husband was first client

Born of "headstrong and heartwise mountaineering stock" in West Virginia, Dr. Harkness has her Ph.D. in higher education from the University of North Texas. But her true vocational education came through her life experiences.

In 1953, the 25-year-old graduate of the University of West Virginia married her brother's roommate at the Naval Academy, "just like a Debbie Reynolds movie."

"Back then, a woman married a man with 'potential' and then you 'activated' his potential. That was your success. What a sham!" she declares. "But anyway, that's what I did. I followed the rules."

Her husband became, in essence, her first client. Life aboard a submarine didn't suit his nature, so she helped him get out of his military obligation. She sent him through medical school on her teacher's salary and had three children during the process.

"He was a first-rate physician but a second-rate husband," she says. The marriage ended painfully after 18 years.

She went back to school for her doctorate, which took her eight years as she juggled learning, teaching and parenting with only \$300 a month in child support.

Many of her clients today are women whose husbands have abandoned them for trophy wives, she says. "These men hit their midlife crisis, and instead of dealing with themselves, they dump their families," she says. "It gives me great pleasure to help these women find careers. My motto for them is: 'Your success is the best revenge.'"

Dr. Harkness asks new clients to list their success criteria—things that give their lives purpose. Then they evaluate

how their jobs live up to these needs.

"This also becomes their prescription for what they're looking for next," she says, calling these imperatives "glass balls."

"We have to distinguish between the glass balls that we're juggling and the rubber ones. If you drop a glass ball, it breaks. You can glue it back, but it will be distorted. Rubber balls you can drop and pick up later.

"Many successful people—both women and men—are saying, 'My children are a big glass ball. I'm going to honor that and step back and go with a lesser need to achieve."

Predicting chaos

Defining yourself as a hyperkinetic Type A or an introspective Type B is irrelevant, she says, "We have to be Type CCs, Chaos Catalysts, because we live in a chaotic world. And while you may not be able to predict what chaos lies ahead, you'll be prepared to handle it when it hits."

She doesn't necessarily sell the idea of breaking out of corporate life. Independence isn't for everyone.

And you can be in the right career but wrong job, she says.

She's horrified by the insensitivity of some corporations, offering as evidence an e-mail sent to terminate a senior vice president who'd been at the company 19 years. It begins: "You have been declared surplus."

Too often companies treat employees like machinery instead of human capital.

She has a warning for them: "Your best people are not going to be cogs in anyone's wheels. They have options."

She has an equally pointed caveat for employees who toil in silent misery: "Dissatisfaction with your job will shorten your life."

And she intends to work for 25 more years.

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HOW THEIR LIVES CHANGED

When making billions just isn't enough

Entrepreneur has finally found calling in clarity

Todd Wagner describes people trapped in jobs as doing "the walk of the living dead." He's experienced it twice, and both times, career counselor Helen Harkness came to his rescue.

She and Mr. Wagner first crossed paths in 1991, when he took her informal course at Southern Methodist University called "Running from the Law" – sort of group therapy for disgruntled lawyers. At 30, he fit the bill.

He'd gone to law school for lack of anything better to do and graduated from the University of Virginia in 1986. At first he liked carrying a briefcase, acting like an adult and driving to the downtown Dallas office of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP. But that was fleeting.

Three years later, Mr. Wagner tried switching to another law firm, Hopkins & Sutter, hoping things would be better.

"I discovered that had nothing to do with it. I just wasn't cut out to be a lawyer," he says. "But like so many people, I still didn't do anything about it."

By 1992, he was a partner,



MCNA, FREDERICK, Staff Photographer

pulling down \$200,000 or so, but he was miserable.

Dr. Harkness hounded him about escaping. The warning that finally stuck was: "If you don't quit, you're going to be dead of a heart attack or something by the time you're 45."

He realized she was right. "When the pain becomes greater than the fear of the unknown, that's when you go," Mr. Wagner says. "Finally the pain was so great, I didn't care if I swept floors or bartended, I just wasn't going to do that anymore."

When he resigned to explore "this thing called the 'Internet,'" the senior

partner of the law firm told Mr. Wagner he'd never make it as an entrepreneur.

"I was scared because I didn't know what I was going to do next," Mr. Wagner recalls. "But you know what, I was really exhilarated, too. It was the happiest time maybe of my whole life."

Well, perhaps the second happiest. When he and his college-buddy-turned-partner Mark Cuban sold Broadcast.com to Yahoo, they pocketed more money than either could spend in two lifetimes.

Ironically, this good fortune led to

his second career crisis.

In a remarkable move, Mr. Wagner turned down Yahoo's offer to stay on as chief operating officer.

He also turned down Mr. Cuban's offer to go halves in buying the Dallas Mavericks. He needed soul renewal, not to jump into another business inferno.

Instead, he started his charitable foundation, which focuses on helping inner-city residents—partly to salve his conscience.

Instead, he started his charitable foundation, which focuses on helping inner-city residents—partly to salve his conscience.

"Look, I've been incredibly lucky, beyond lucky, and I needed to do the right thing," says Mr. Wagner, who calls himself a social entrepreneur. "Giving money is the easiest thing on the planet to do. I'm giving my time and trying to make a difference for other people as well.

"It helps me feel that it's OK for me to live, let's face it, this dream life that I now have.

After nearly five years, Mr. Wagner says he couldn't be happier with where his life is heading.

"I've re-engaged back on the entertainment and for-profit world again in the last two years. But it feels good because it's a good balance."

Cheryl Hall



JUAN GARCIA, Staff Photographer

Nancy Wiese gave up a lucrative job to follow her heart as a personal trainer.

Doctor shapes up her career

When Nancy Wiese's executive position at a major health maintenance organization was eliminated in early 2003, she was offered several internal options.

Instead, she opted out.

The 48-year old doctor of osteopathic medicine was making "well into the six figures" as vice president and medical director of disability management for Intracorp, a division of Cigna Corp.

Today, she's a Pilates exercise instructor charging \$75 to \$100 an hour. She meets clients at workout facilities all over town but says she plans to eventually open her own studio.

"I wanted to do something creative and innovative. Those two things are not easy to pull off in a large corporate environment," says Dr. Wiese, one of career counselor Helen Harkness' clients.

"It's not about money. It's about following my heart. If I don't do this now, I may never do anything that I personally feel strongly about."

Dr. Wiese says she's not giving up her expertise in occupational medicine. "I'm very willing to work with people who've had multiple surgeries, injuries or disabilities and want to improve their wellness. I'm not dropping everything. I'm just taking it in a different direction."

Remolding her career has taken longer than she expected, partly because she explored other interests before settling on Pilates, which she's used to keep fit for four years.

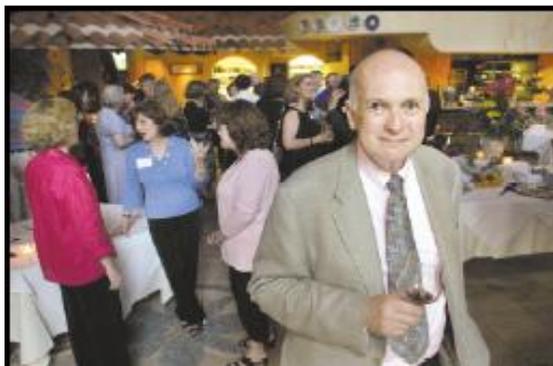
For example, she spent two months at an organic winery in France, thinking she might like to be a vintner. She hasn't ruled that out but figures that for the time being Pilates is less complicated and far less expensive.

It's that reality thing Dr. Harkness always harps on.

Dr. Wiese recently chatted via e-mail with her former boss to give him a progress reports.

"He said, 'It sounds like you're following your passion.' And I thought, 'Yeah, I am.'"

Cheryl Hall



'It's me, and I love it'

Leaving IBM has paid off for editor

Ed Bamberger has been through an evolution, not a revolution.

In 1991, rather than relocate with IBM Corp., the marketing writer decided to take a buyout and venture out on his own.

He went to career counselor Helen Harkness, and what she told him wasn't exactly music to his ears: He wasn't a strong creative writer but was talented at editing and copywriting.

"She really focuses on strengths and weaknesses and pointed out things I was trying to do that were never going to work for me," says Mr. Bamberger, who turns 60 today.

So he cobbled together a freelance editing business that incorporated his love of food and wine.

But it never brought in the kind of money that he needed. So three years ago, he bought the North Texas marketing rights to Single Gourmet, which holds culinary events for single professionals.

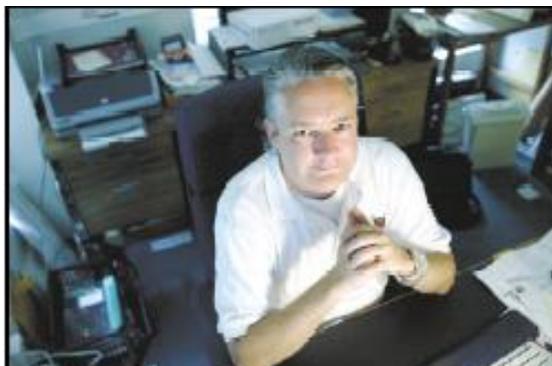
"It put together all of my passions: being a writer, being a foodie, and I love being around people," he says.

"We do dinner parties in restaurants, hold cooking classes and wine tastings. I'm working about 70 to 80 hours a week, and I have four part-time people. This is a serious business making serious money. It's me, and I love it."

In October, Mr. Bamberger will lead a tour to France, where the group is staying in one of the world's best hotels.

It's a tough job, he says, but somebody has to do it.

Cheryl Hall



Doing it by the Book

Career again intrigues businessman

Harry Hunsicker Jr. has never met Helen Harkness or any other career counselor. He sparked up his career on his own.

The 41-year-old president of Hunsicker Appraisal Co. jokes – halfheartedly – that commercial real estate appraisals are for people who find working at a major accounting firm too exciting.

He added a healthy dose of creative energy to his painstakingly detailed world by writing—and selling—a crime thriller.

Still Rivers Run Dead, scheduled for publication by St. Martin's Press next summer, features a private investigator in Dallas burdened with the name Lee Henry Oswald who is "drawn into the shadowy world of

smooth-talking drug lords and double-dealing real estate developers."

Since his advance wouldn't buy him a new Lexus, Mr. Hunsicker didn't do this for the money. He wanted to pursue a passion he discovered after taking a course in creative writing at Southern Methodist University.

Writing the murder mystery, which took about six months, proved to be the easy part. Finding an agent took three times as long.

He sent out query letters to 118 agents and was rejected by 117. The agent who took that chance lined up St. Martin's in only a month.

And, Mr. Hunsicker says, having a creative outlet rejuvenated his feelings for the 37-year old family appraisal business he took over in January.

"I've had so much fun, this should have been illegal," he says.

Cheryl Hall

IT'S TIME FOR A CHANGE IF....

- You dread going to work.
- You're not learning something daily that you value
- Your skills and personality don't match what you're doing most of the time
- You're on a treadmill to nowhere
- Your value system is not being satisfied.
- Your organization is not treating you or others fairly.
- There's a huge gap between your aspirations and reality
- Your industry is going down the tubes and opportunities are disappearing
- You wear a mask at work and feel like you leave the best part of yourself at home.

SOURCE: Helen Harkness

TO LEARN MORE

Helen Harkness charges \$4,900 for testing, 40 hours of group sessions and 11 hours of mentoring, or \$6,900 for a two-year retainer.

She also teaches informal courses at Southern Methodist University's School of Continuing Education and at The S'Cool, a new, casual adult-education organization that holds classes in the area.

For more information on The S'Cool, go to www.thescool.com and click on "Career Planning and Business Smarts."

For information about SMU courses, call 214-768-9035; go to www.informal.smu.edu or e-mail smuthink.smu.edu.

For descriptions of Dr. Harkness' classes and private sessions, go to www.career-design.com or for additional information call Career Design Associates at 972-278-4701.