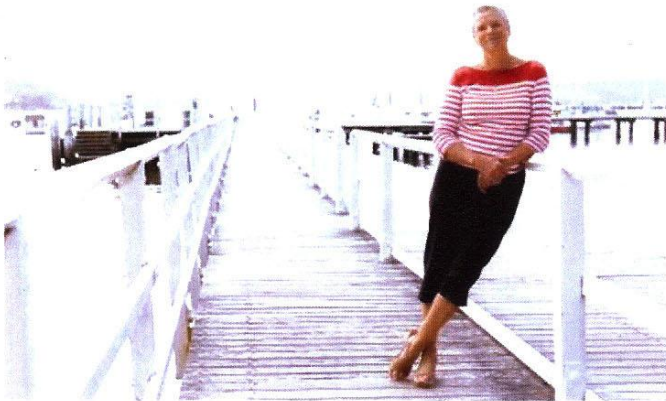


# NORTHSIDE MAGAZINE

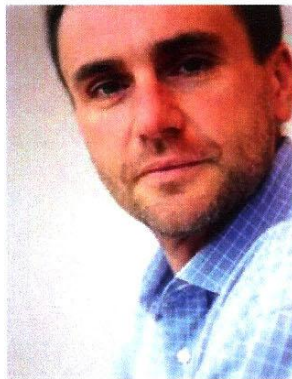
FEATURE | BACK TO WORK



## BACK TO WORK

WHEN FACED WITH ONE OF THE THREE Rs – RUG RATS, RETRENCHMENT OR RETIREMENT – HOW DO YOU PICK YOURSELF UP AND RETURN TO THE WORKFORCE?

WORDS KERRIE DAVIES MAIN PICTURE YIE SANDISON



TOP: Judy Cole. LEFT: Nigel Marsh, author of *Overworked and Underpaid – a gloriously funny guide to life*. ABOVE: Sir Richard Branson.

There's an interesting line in Judy Cole's CV, between corporate IT jobs and her current position as a life coach. It says: "2000 – 2004: Circumnavigated the world in a restored yacht".

Officially, Judy retired in 2000 to cross the oceans for the rest of her life. But six months into the round-the-world trip, anchored in the Antilles, she realised that cruising was a break, rather than a life plan. She and her then partner agreed to continue circumnavigating the globe then return to land – and work.

"Doing night watch on a yacht under the stars gives you a lot of time to think," Cole, now 64, says. "I thought, 'What the hell am I going to do?' Out there, I realised that there were a lot of people in the same boat as me. Not literally, but in the same position: ready for a different life, not the rocking chair."

By the time they'd docked the boat, and with it the dream of endless sunsets, the impressively fit and vibrant Cole had a plan. She would study life coaching and specialise in help mature-age workers make the transition to and from retirement. After pitching the idea to community colleges, she is now working with a mature-age specialist consulting company, Sageco.

As well as retirement, many people are facing the daunting prospect of returning to paid work after extended absences: caring for children or unemployment.

Whichever of the three Rs (retirement, rug rats, retrenchment) that applies, it takes continued confidence to withstand the job hunt, then settle into a new work environment. Take heart that lots of others have been in your (new) shoes.

### ... AFTER RETIRING

By cutting short her retirement, Cole was on the money. A new report by a Sydney micro-economist found that women in their late 50s and early 60s are returning to the workforce, both because of longevity and superannuation concerns. According to Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, only 1 per cent of women in the workforce aged between 18 and 49 are earning more than

\$100,000, which translates to less savings for retirement.

Now, the Government has announced a \$1000 bonus for 10,000 employers who employ an older jobless worker, to encourage mature-age employment.

"Everybody wants security with money coming in," Cole says. "I certainly did."

When looking to return to work after retirement, volunteering can help regain confidence and clarify direction, as well as give back to the community.

"I volunteer with Sailability, which teaches people with disabilities how to sail," Cole says. "I also work with Yachting Australia, which is turning into a second career as I am a race manager there now."

It's also a time to continue education.

"We are constantly advising to take stock, look at your skills, look at your knowledge base and where you can invest in training to maintain employability," encourages Alison Monroe, Sageco managing director.

But Cole is all for embracing age and experiences – in the office and out – when compiling your new and improved CV.

"You look older, so it's better to have it out on the table and talk about your experiences. I like what Richard Branson says when he's asked his age. He says, 'I'm younger than Mick Jagger.'"

### ... AFTER RUG RATS

Children are expensive. Social researcher Mark McCrindle estimates the actual bottom line of raising the average family is more than \$1 million.

"If it drops to one child, it's still \$557,013," he says. The government estimate is over \$334,000, but McCrindle says that is "woefully inadequate". So even with the cost of childcare denting the take-home pay, another income can significantly boost the family finances, or supplement child support if a single parent.

The ING Direct Financial Wellbeing Index found that 53 per cent of women had increased their earnings last year, (compared to 41 per cent of men) through returning to work or taking a second job.

According to Jennifer Baxter, from the

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Institute of Family Studies, the timing of mothers' return to work after childbearing is related to a wide range of variables, including mothers' preferences and opinions about the appropriateness of staying home when children are young, and access to maternity leave.

But while busy with the children, an old job description may have changed dramatically, just as you might be a different person now. So again, Monroe urges updating training for the future, especially if you have a timeline in mind.

"My mother looked to enter the workforce in her 50s after raising three kids," Monroe says. "She could type 100 words a minute and do shorthand. But she didn't have contemporary skills. She learnt Microsoft suite at evening college and got a job at a real estate agency."

Regardless of whether it's one, five, 10 or 15 years before returning, any working mother will tell you, it's important to prepare for the work-family juggle as much as the new job.

"I feel a little regretful, even a little embarrassed, at how long it has taken me to appreciate just how demanding it is in the modern world for a mother who also has a career," Abbott said recently.

To this end, therapist Marie Rowland has begun Superwoman workshops. "I certainly saw many women in my counselling practice whose depression and anxiety were symptoms of being over-stretched, giving to all, but leaving very little for themselves," she says. "The Superwoman workshop is designed to refocus on the self and to alleviate guilt and the need to be perfect through self-acceptance and mindful living. We also address 'practical powers' such as nutrition, sleep, and wellbeing."

*Superwoman's Toolkit workshop on April 28 Neutral Bay, 2-5pm, \$149, includes health sessions. Ph: 0417 123 124*

#### ... AFTER RETRENCHMENT

"Being redundant doesn't have the same stigma as it used to have," Monroe encourages. But it still hurts.

"It's a kick," agrees Judy Cole. "I was retrenched from Sun Microsystems. I felt



ABOVE: Mark McCrindle; Alison Monroe; Judy Cole retired to circumnavigate the globe.

indignant. I'd brought in so much business! But I used it as time to reassess and realised I wanted to be self-employed so I started my own IT consultancy."

"In February 2010, there were 693,300 unemployed people, of whom 273,000 (or 39.4 per cent) had become involuntarily unemployed (retrenched) in the past two years. Monroe believes that the age at which you are retrenched can affect how you handle it as much as your personality and your exit package.

"We see confidence knocked in a lot of mature age workers," Monroe says, about returning to the workforce after a break or shock. "(But) it can be an opportunity to try something new. We see a lot of people pick up their passions and hobbies and revisit them, through starting a creative business or finding an opportunity that offers that at an organisation."

Nigel Marsh did that when he wrote *Fat, Forty and Fired* after losing his job. He took a year off in which he wrote the bestselling memoir, lost 20kg, and reconnected with his family. He later co-founded Earth Hour. But before these dream developments, he returned to work as head of an advertising agency, and he is honest that he returned sooner than planned because he was supporting a family. Reassessment has to be realistic. "Screw my retirement," he remembers thinking. "How

are we going to get through September?" He has since written, *Overworked and Underpaid - a gloriously funny guide to life* (Allen & Unwin), and is trying to retire again to write a third book *Fit, Fifty & Fired Up*.

Cole points out that whether coming back to work from looking after rug rats, retirement or retrenchment, it's a good time to look in the mirror, seriously, as Marsh did on every level.

"I did one-on-one counselling with a woman who was retrenched from the public service," Cole recalls. "She was stuck in the past. I told her to have a makeover. She got a new haircut, stopped smoking and lost weight. We went through her CV and instead of an accounting job, she pitched herself as a change management specialist, as she'd overseen the implementation of new computer systems and other change at her previous work. She was shortlisted for jobs, then was offered a position with a major company. She has a great career, and she said it benefited her relationship, too."

Whichever of the three Rs applies to you, Cole urges embracing your experiences rather than hiding them. "I do say, 'I took three years off to sail.' It's more acceptable now to say you've taken a break. We don't climb the ladder any more. Our career is more climbing a lattice."

#### Where to find work:

**Hidden job market:** Network with friends and relatives in the industry you want, approach companies you'd like to work for and join professional associations. Attend industry events.

**Advertised jobs:** Careerone.com.au has jobs, career advice, including getting started, job hunting, writing a CV and preparing for an interview.

**Think local:** 1376 jobs have been created by the jobs1001 campaign, which aims to generate jobs in local communities. W: jobs1001.org.au

**Think about self-employment:** Do you have a marketable idea or skill? Can you start small? Go to: jobaccess.gov.au and for advice: business.gov.au

**Go back to school:** Universities, TAFE and private colleges offer mature-age entry to most courses, from certificates to postgraduate degrees. There's also Open University, which offers distance education.

#### Do you have these "employability" skills?

**Problem solving:** The capacity to develop creative, innovative and practical solutions.


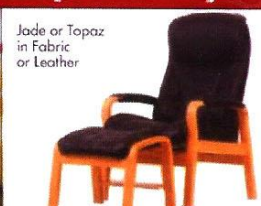

**Initiative and enterprise:** The ability to adapt to change, develop effective work practices, identify opportunities and translate ideas into action.

**Planning and organising:** Capacity to manage priorities by setting timelines, co-ordinating tasks and working systematically.

**Self management:** Having a personal vision and clear goals, self-evaluation, self improvement to enhance performance, having clarity and confidence and taking responsibility.

**Technology:** Basic understanding of word processing, spreadsheets and internet/email. Social media has become a marketing tool as much as personal. Join Twitter conversations in your area of interests, Linked In for networking and Pinterest if you are into design, the arts and food.

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