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Declan Doherty; Dermot Donohue



## Six steps towards changing your life

**Dream:** How does your dream life look? What do you long for? Have you wanted to do something for a very long time?

**No fear:** Is fear holding you back? How are you getting in your own way? Take a step-by-step approach. There really are no limits to what you can achieve.

**Value yourself:** Start believing that you are a unique package with your own strengths, talents, skills and accomplishments. Make an inventory of what's special about you. List your values or motivators.

**Your passions:** What do you love doing? When are you most energised? In what environments do you feel most alive? What kind of people do you like to be surrounded by?

**Seek support:** Surround yourself with positive people who want the best for you.

**Bridge your transition:** Use a stepping stone approach. You might want to engage in part-time learning in your local college or training centre. Volunteering is a great way to test out and develop new skills.

*Career Coach (Gill & MacMillan €14.99) by Dearbhla Kelly is out now*



crime investigation room. She felt it might be time for a radical change.

When I met up with Marley, we tried to figure out ways she could create more meaning in her working life. During our chats, it emerged she had a passion for the outdoors, kayaking, the community, gardens and flowers. Understandably, as a garda, a cloud of crime and crises shadowed many of her dealings with the public and she craved interaction with people in more positive ways. We identified her values — her need for freedom, autonomy and creativity — and we began to clarify her next steps.

It seemed that an enterprise would best suit her skills, talents and value system. Eventually she took the leap, and resigned from the gardai earlier this year. She is now the owner of Marley and Tea Cloghan Garden Centre in Cloghan, Co Donegal.

"People thought I was crazy, giving up a permanent, pensionable government job, but I thought, what's the worst that can happen?" she says. "I embraced a 'nothing to lose and everything to gain' attitude and took a variety of steps to get to where I am now. That included attending a Start Your Own Business course, learning from other business owners and renovating a disused factory premises.

"I earn substantially less than before, but it's early days," adds Marley. "The hours are long but the trade-offs are worth it. The customers are great and there is a spirit of excellence in all my staff. And it is a joy being surrounded by flowers and plants.

"I know I've made the right choice — I feel like I'm blooming."

While it is estimated we are likely to have an average of seven different jobs in our lives, and some change their career three to four times, for many who are mid-career it can feel easier to stay in an area where they are unhappy rather than embark on a new job.

Daragh Curran spent a decade working on the forecourt of a garage, having lost direction after dropping out of college. Now, he lectures in history at University College Dublin, having completed a PhD at Oxford University and worked with Roy Foster, professor of history at the university's Hertford College.

"After 10 years as a petrol pump attendant, my own tank was running on empty," says Curran, 43. "I'd dropped out of a computer course, because technology simply wasn't for me. I can pinpoint my breakthrough moment. It was during a guidance session where I was encouraged to follow my true love, which is history. I seriously doubted my abilities and I

**Dreaming spires** Oxford University was the ultimate destination for Daragh Curran, above, a former petrol pump attendant; below right, careers coach Dearbhla Kelly

was extremely shy, living at home and lacking in self-belief.

"We mapped out the steps I could take that would make a move away from home and into Maynooth University less intimidating. This involved exploring access courses for mature students, the CAO process and getting grant and social welfare advice."

Curran's love affair with history deepened at Maynooth, and led to his PhD after he completed his primary degree. He says: "I constantly wondered when I would be 'found out'. However, that never happened and, in retrospect, I see the whole thing as a journey towards confidence. I never imagined that I'd be able to teach tutorials, give presentations and hold my own in front of students."

His journey was not a short one. It took him eight years and he did it on a shoestring budget, but he got there and completely changed his life in the process.

"Going to college opened up unexpected doors for me," he says. "Conducting research for Roy Foster, the fantastic feeling of getting my doctorate, having my own book published and then lecturing — it's a far cry from filling the tanks of cars on wet, windy days in Ardara. I'm more confident and always on the lookout for more opportunities in historical research, archives and lecturing."

**The hours are long but the trade-offs are worth it. It's a joy being surrounded by flowers and plants. I know I've made the right choice as I feel like I'm blooming**

## Windows of opportunity

Forty-year-old Nigel Harkin had a window cleaning business, but was always interested in mental wellness and nursing.

"I never pursued it, because I thought that, by the time I trained, I'd be too old," he says. "But one day I had an epiphany. I was cleaning the windows for St Conal's Mental Health Hospital in Letterkenny. Looking in at the patients and nurses, it came home to me that my work didn't hold any meaning for me, but I did feel a calling to contribute to the mental wellness of people.

"After my meetings with Dearbhla, I realised that there were ways to transition into nursing. She took me through all the information regarding entry criteria, interviews, applications and financial supports and helped me to address my concerns. My wife, Martina, was also inspired to branch out from being a stay-at-home mum. She retrained and gained a qualification in childcare with Donegal ETB."

After four years training, Harkin re-entered St Conal's as a fully qualified mental health nurse.

"This time I was on the inside looking out. The transformation involved a lot of work for us, on many levels. Was it worth the effort, sacrifice and hard work? In terms of job satisfaction, yes. Life is too short to be doing something that you don't want to do."

Harkin now works as a mental health nurse in the Department of Psychiatry in Letterkenny General Hospital.

"You're never too old to change, he says. "You just need to confront your fears, take action and believe that good things can happen."



**Moving on**  
Harkin is now a mental health nurse