

# a break with the past

After much soul-searching, Susanna Stuart is leaving the corporate world behind. She explains her decision

**M**y big news... I've made a career change. As I write this, I've just moved into the slightly delicious and yet decidedly scary zone of establishing my own business as a fully independent financial adviser. This, after an entire career working for other people and, for the most part, working in large organisations.

The strange thing is, although I find it easy to talk with people about their life goals and financial situation then help them prepare a plan, in my own case I felt I had no blueprint, no clarity. It was hard to be objective.

Yet, slowly, I found corporate life was cluttering up my life and grinding me down. There were too many meetings that no longer seemed productive.

Then I'd train and mentor new staff, which was very rewarding, but they'd inevitably leave to continue their career path. Increasingly, I felt that, personally, I was no longer able to soar. Instead, there I was, safe and secure on the tarmac – preparing others for lift-off.

At the same time, I had an awakening sense of adventure, the result of meeting members of Surf Lifesaving last year. They generously opened a door to me to become involved in their world, and that experience helped me to realise there were new pathways in life to explore.

But I had to deal with my own feelings too. I'm quite risk-averse and was a little uneasy about the idea of going out on my own. I fear failure and I'm not a great fan of uncertainty. My first plan of action was to seek advice, and I spent a valuable hour with a leading business-woman whom I respect deeply. She has an excellent track record of turning



## why small businesses fail

- 1 Lack of focus on what makes the business different, better for customers.
- 2 Lack of capital. You need adequate money to set up your business properly.
- 3 Poor cashflow. Often caused by weak paperwork and billing.
- 4 Bad hiring decisions.
- 5 Lack of planning. Making it up as you go along.

businesses around and starting up new ventures. She was kind to extend to me her wisdom, and I valued the clarity of her thinking. Her message was simple: "Go for it."

A barrister gave me similar encouragement. He told me he'd never regretted his decision to leave the big corporate world several years ago.

Armed with this advice, I set about planning my business and applying my skills to my situation. It has been a period of learning, and among the things I've learned is that if you're setting up a business, have a clear vision of what you want to achieve. How will your business be different? What elements will make it unique and successful? Be absolutely clear. Write it down.

Also, make sure you have a supportive network around you. Every owner of a new business needs trustworthy advice and guidance. A good network of selected people will function like a board of directors.

Your new business is not just about money, it is also about lifestyle. The more I have envisaged my new business, the more I realise it is an opportunity to work with the style and service I wish to offer: essence of 'me' but without the corporate clutter.

That last point resonates with my own professional direction. Increasingly, I think my profession of financial planning is branching into two paths. One avenue is about selling financial products and earning commission. The other is about selling advice, not just about financial matters, but about life. It is life planning.

That's the path I've chosen, and I'm eager to discover where this new avenue takes me. **■**