

## Background

# A change of direction

### Katie Jacobson

I had worked as an account manager in a travel agency for twelve years and felt as though I was stagnating. I asked for a sabbatical so that my partner and I could visit the old pilgrim routes of France and Spain. I thought my boss would think I deserved a sabbatical, but it was obvious he couldn't wait to get rid of me on a permanent basis. So I decided to hand in my resignation. We took the six-week holiday, and then we started up our own agency helping people who owned properties in France and Spain to rent them out as holiday lets. It took a while to get off the ground but now Julia can run it on her own. The strangest thing is that I am now back at my old company. My old boss left under a cloud and I was invited to replace him – it was a really sweet feeling!

### Steve Cullen

Well, my career break was forced on me really. My IT company was going through a difficult patch and was thinking about shedding staff. It came up with a redundancy avoidance scheme. If people agreed to take a year's unpaid leave, they would get a quarter of their annual salary. I agreed to do it. With the money I went to central America as a volunteer. At first I felt like a fish out of water, but it was good to do something that pushed me out of my comfort zone. I worked among people who were really poor, but who were dignified and happy. It's an old cliché, but it showed me that there is more to life than money. I am back at work now and it doesn't seem to have affected my position on the career ladder. In fact, with my newly improved Spanish skills and experience of living abroad, they have made me a tempting offer to be part of the management team in the Bogotá office.

### Linda Harper

I'd hardly call it a career break as I only took three months off work. I was working backstage at a big London theatre, but wanted to try my hand at being a playwright. I got a grant that allowed me to take some unpaid leave and I managed to get a draft of my play done. I am fairly confident that something will come off. I have come back to my job with a new-found enthusiasm. The interesting thing is that the actors and the other members of staff view me differently now. Even if I am unable to become a full-time playwright, I have a number of different ideas that I would like to see through. In the meantime, I shall carry on with what I am doing and work my way up into theatre management. Just three months out helped me put everything into perspective and decide on my career path.

### Bruce Edwards

Having worked for an insurance firm for twenty-six years without a break I was suddenly made to take early retirement following a merger. The redundancy package was fantastic, they gave me a huge lump sum and a pension, so I didn't need to work again. All the same, I didn't want to get bored. My wife encouraged me to look into other business opportunities. I came across a franchise that could make the most of my old skills, so we decided to put a large sum of money into buying one. It hasn't been a career break, but rather a break with the past. I have a new career now at the age of 57 and feel really energized and enthusiastic about it. I have made the business grow and am thinking of applying for franchises in three other cities. I only wish I had decided to go into business on my own years ago. Retirement is for wimps!

## Exercises

### 1 Work with a partner and answer these questions.

- 1 If you could go back in time, what different career path would you take?
- 2 If your firm gave you a paid sabbatical for a year, what would you do with it?

### 2 Read about four people who took career breaks, or a change in direction. Decide who said or did the following things. Who ...

- 1 ... was told they no longer had a job?
- 2 ... avoided redundancy?
- 3 ... has begun an entirely new career?
- 4 ... has a better idea of where he / she wants to go?
- 5 ... worked with underprivileged people?
- 6 ... started a new business, then left it?
- 7 ... obtained a kind of revenge?
- 8 ... took the shortest break?
- 9 ... doesn't believe in retirement?
- 10 ... returned to his / her firm in a senior position?
- 11 ... is glad he / she was forced to do something unfamiliar?

### 3 Match 1–8 to a–h. Then look back at the text to check your answers.

- |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1 difficult  | a package    |
| 2 redundancy | b manager    |
| 3 account    | c zone       |
| 4 career     | d leave      |
| 5 comfort    | e offer      |
| 6 tempting   | f patch      |
| 7 unpaid     | g retirement |
| 8 early      | h path       |

### 4 Using the text to help you, decide what the collocations in 6 mean.

### 5 Complete the sentences by matching 1–5 to a–e.

- 1 If you *try your hand* at something, you ...
  - 2 If you *make the most of* something, you ...
  - 3 If you feel like a *fish out of water*, you ...
  - 4 If you *put something into perspective*, you ...
  - 5 If you leave somewhere *under a cloud*, ...
- a people think that you have done something to damage your reputation.
  - b look at something in a more reasonable way.
  - c feel uncomfortable and awkward in unfamiliar surroundings.
  - d attempt to do something you've never done before.
  - e try to get something positive from it.

### 6 Have you ever done any of the things in 5? Discuss with a partner.

### 7 Look back at the text and choose three words that you could use in your day-to-day work.

### 8 Discuss these questions in small groups.

- 1 Is it better to work your way up one career ladder, or to change career paths?
- 2 What are the benefits and drawbacks of staff taking sabbaticals?