

Using Pieces of a Career Crash to Build Something New

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This first-person account of changing careers and starting a business is one in a series of eight stories shared by Next Avenue readers. The full collection is available [here](https://www.nextavenue.org/career-shift-stories/) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/career-shift-stories/>).

By Stephanie Weinberger

By September 2020 the writing was on the wall. It had become clear to many of us at [The Cocoa Exchange](https://www.confectionerynews.com/Article/2017/05/15/Cocoa-Exchange-Mars-sets-up-e-commerce-party-program-for-chocolate#:~:text=The%20Cocoa%20Exchange%20allows%20) (<https://www.confectionerynews.com/Article/2017/05/15/Cocoa-Exchange-Mars-sets-up-e-commerce-party-program-for-chocolate#:~:text=The%20Cocoa%20Exchange%20allows%20>), a division of [Mars Inc.](https://www.mars.com/) (<https://www.mars.com/>), that the business was not going to survive. Despite this being obvious, I was hopeful. I loved my career and had built the division from a trial in New Jersey to a successful national business.

This was going to be my home until retirement. I was certainly not looking to make a career change at 56 years old, let alone during a worldwide pandemic. After almost 15 years, my career was more than just a job, it had become my identity and I was known by most as the chocolate lady.

Beyond the question of how I would recoup a six-figure income, I was struggling with who I would become at a stage where I thought that was well established. Yes, I was still a mother, but my children were grown; I was still a wife and partner, but my husband had his own successful career. Where did this leave me?

At an age when many people begin winding down their careers, how do you start a new one? I took some solace in knowing we had developed an amazing tribe of supportive and encouraging team members throughout the nation and knew this was something you didn't often find in corporate America. Of course I was also concerned about who would want to hire someone

at my stage of life with my salary requirement. The idea of hard work or building from scratch was far less scary.

My first step was to work at my husband's business, which I had left over 15 years ago. Time can be a powerful eraser, but I soon recalled why this was not the answer for me. His business could not offer the independence I was accustomed to and it could not use my skills as a leader and a sales and marketing expert. There's nothing quite like going backwards to clarify your real needs. I lasted eight weeks.

While contemplating how to better use my skills and passion while trying to replace a robust income, I kept thinking about a friend with a small business that offered an amazing product. Over the years I had become a huge advocate for him, sharing the products with everyone, and he had often said that he would hire me instantly.

However, I knew that working for someone else was not what I needed at this stage. I needed some autonomy and control.

My desire to spread the word about his product combined with my passion to remain in control of my career that led me to start [LifiBifi](https://lifibifi.com/) (<https://lifibifi.com/>), a marketplace for small businesses, and reconnect with talented former colleagues — all of whom were also over 50 and in the same career jam I was.

Together we realized that we had much to offer small businesses struggling to be found. We also had an extensive network of people who valued unique, premium products that weren't sold everywhere.

By starting LifiBifi — an abbreviation of Little Fish Big Fish — we fulfill both our personal needs and those of the many small businesses with amazing products that no one knew existed. Being able to offer consumers amazing discoveries and work with my incredible team of like-minded women to help entrepreneurs has exceeded my expectations for a career after I lost my



corporate job.

Life may have thrown us a curve ball but it also has allowed us to grow, learn and reach a broader market while helping more people. Maybe life really does begin in our fifties.

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