

Tired of spending your days in cubicle city? Join the brave new world of Generation Flux, where a one-job-fits-all approach is no longer your only option.

BY SARAH BRITTEN

**'Career is Dead.'** Like everyone else in this anonymous presentation room, I'm intrigued by the title of this talk. The first speaker has told us how the people behind BOS Iced Tea managed to secure millions in venture capital. Now uber-cool entrepreneur **Rich Mulholland**, below, is telling us that the old idea of a career, where you studied after school and worked your way up the corporate ladder until you retired at 65, is past its sell-by date; that our education system is all wrong; that if you're going to achieve something big, you have to do it when you're young.

Sobering stuff. Most of us were raised on the assumption that we'd study, go into a particular field, and stay there. Now the great tectonic shifts of a world in flux have sent us tumbling into the crevasses between the old way and an uncertain new direction where anything goes. New concepts are appearing with bewildering frequency: the creative class, the portfolio career, the slasher.

In January, US business magazine *Fast Company* introduced the concept of 'Generation Flux': 'What defines GenFlux is a mindset that embraces instability, that tolerates – and even enjoys – recalibrating careers, business models and assumptions.'

The contrast from generation to generation is astounding. This year, my father will retire after more than 40 years with the same employer. I was once given a personally engraved Mont Blanc pen for long service after being with an advertising agency for two years. A month ago, I walked away from corporate life for good. No salary, no pension, no medical aid.

### MONEY DOESN'T BUY HAPPINESS

I'm not the only one handing in the company laptop and saying to hell with it. More and more, I am noticing that people in their 30s are choosing to renounce the security of salaries to find meaning in what they do. 'All this money you earn, what do you actually need it for?' reflects Sean Shannon. 'To spend spend spend on stuff that you don't really need, to make you feel happy because your job is depressing you so much.'

Sean, 38, spent 15 years in banking, 10 of them in London, before he took off his tie and pursued his dream of being a rugby commentator. He sold the GTi but kept the Vespa; he and his girlfriend (who had left her well-paying job shortly before they met) have just moved to Cape Town. He's happier than he has been in a long time.

Others echo Sean's disillusionment with corporate life. 'I found my insides disagreeing violently with practically everything happening around me,' recalls



columnist, radio host and author Ndumiso Ngcobo, 40. Several years ago he quit 'a mongrel of a job' in technical management. 'It was the best decision I ever took,' he says. 'I wake up looking forward to my day. I structure it to suit me and work at my own pace. And I'm lucky to be making more money than I would have, had I stayed in the corporate world – even if I'd been promoted two levels up.'

Like many women, Tanya Kovarsky, 36, wanted to devote more time to being a mother. Tanya – who describes herself in her Twitter biography as 'Ex mag hag, now writer, editor, blogger and social media slag' – resigned as editor of *Living and Loving* in late 2011 to run her own consultancy. There are risks involved with going out on your own, she says. 'But I'm learning and being challenged, and love that I am mostly in control of my work.'

### DRIVING FACTORS

There are several strands interwoven in this trend, and to understand what's happening, it's worth prising them apart. Firstly, people are reassessing what matters to them. 'Careers are no longer as streamlined as before and people are increasingly feeling the need to choose a career path that resonates with who they are and what they value,' observes Zakiyya Essa, counselling psychologist and founder of The Career Guidance Company. 'Factors such as

achievement, a sense of purpose and job satisfaction tend to play as important a role as earning a living.'

There are economic and structural factors too. The global recession, cheap Asian labour, BEE requirements, outsourcing; all of this has placed pressure on the solid, income tax-paying middle class.

Many people are not saving enough for retirement, which means that they may not be able to afford to stop working. One day 65 won't be the age you retire, it'll be the age you do something different.

Then there's the desire for more flexibility. As technology makes it easier for us to work remotely, traffic gets worse, and working professionals choose to spend more time with their families, the trend towards less conventional hours becomes more apparent. 'People are no longer happy with traditional working hours and feel the need to define their hours to accommodate flexible routines,' says Zakiyya.

### THE SOUTH AFRICAN SITUATION

Despite these strong currents pulling the world of work in a direction that values flexibility, South Africa has a long way to go. Flexitime and work-from-home options are still relatively rare. Many managers feel uncomfortable if their staff is not physically present in the office.

Hiring practices have also not caught up. Peruse the job ads and you'll see the same requirements again and again: full-time, x number of years' experience, cost to company, benefits. Recruiters tick boxes rather than looking at the person, so candidates who don't fit the bill don't stand a chance. If you want to start a new career in your 40s or 50s, forget about going through the front door. To gain a foothold, you need to run your

# The career is dead. Long live

*More and more people in their 30s are choosing to renounce the security of salaries to find meaning in what they do.'*

## Tips for a post-job career

- **Brush up on your skills.** Keep up with latest developments across a variety of fields. Do short courses, attend seminars, follow key thinkers.

- **Two-income families have an advantage here.** It's difficult to take risks when you're the sole breadwinner. Make sure your partner supports your dreams.

- **Spend time online – this is the post-CV era,** where recruiters or potential business partners look at your LinkedIn profile and your tweets before asking for a résumé. Networking is critically important for slashers and it's happening more and more online.

- **Build and maintain relationships with colleagues and clients.** Even if you hate your job, you never know whether a friendship formed in the far corner of cubicle city will turn into another opportunity in your post-job life.

- **Cut your overheads.** People stay in jobs they hate because they need to pay for the luxury car and the expensive home. If you want freedom, you have to be prepared to sacrifice something for it.

# your career

own business, or know people who do.

As for those who have already embraced the notion that the career is dead, what advice would they offer to others? 'I would say you probably need a one-to-two-year period to phase out of your old career into your new,' says Sean. 'Research any studying that you might want to do and make sure it will get you a job in your new profession. When you start your phasing-over period, reduce your expenses. This will not only teach you how to live on a reduced budget but also free up a lot of cash to save while you're still earning a corporate salary.'

Tanya warns against assuming that more freedom will mean an easier life. 'It might seem glamorous or 'easy' being able to have long lunches or go for manicures during the day, but there are fears and risks involved with going solo.' Ndimiso refuses to offer

advice to anyone considering a similar move. 'If you still have to wonder whether you should leave your corporate job to pursue your passions, you're probably not ready to jump. When it's time, you won't need anyone's advice about what to do.'

Back in that hotel room presentation, the solution to the death of the career is becoming obvious. It might seem ironic to talk about the job as an outmoded concept in a country where most of the population don't even know what it's like to have one, but it's clear that if you want to get ahead, you must accept that the job has had its day. You need to have your own business, and you need to do lots of different things. A lot like Rich Mulholland. Or come up with a good idea, like the people behind BOS Iced Tea.

'Just do it,' says Sean. 'You will make a plan if your heart is in it and you commit fully to never going back.' i

## Vocabulary FOR A NEW WORLD OF WORK

### Portfolio Career

First described in the '80s, a portfolio career is one where income is drawn from several different sources. Often your main source of income will be balanced with work you do because you love it.

### Slashers

Slashers are people who have portfolio careers: writer-slash-artist-slash-web editor, lawyer/flight attendant/mountaineer, entrepreneur/strategist/journalist and so on. Erin Albert, the role model for slashers everywhere, is a pharmacist/assistant professor/entrepreneur/writer/law student.

### Generation Flux

Not a demographic but a psychographic, the members of Generation Flux are flexible, adaptable and comfortable with uncertainty. They move from field to field, constantly trying new things. Many of them are slashers familiar with the four-year career.

### The Four-Year Career

Forget the 40-year career; now many members of Generation Flux have four-year careers: try something for a few years, then move into a different field. Think the psychologist who goes off to become a scuba instructor before getting involved in an environmental NGO.

### The 4-Hour Workweek

Timothy Ferriss's best-seller explains how to spend your life having adventures and pursuing your passions, while spending just four hours a week earning a living. To make this work, you need a business that will pretty much run itself, earning passive income for you.

### The Creative Class

Urban development expert Richard Florida has popularised this concept, which refers to people in the sciences, healthcare, arts and entertainment, advertising and product development, tech and other industries that rely on the generation and implementation of ideas. The creative class will be least impacted by job cuts, outsourcing and cheap labour.