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## DESIGNING A TAKE-2 CAREER

Any interior designer would be ecstatic to be one of 15 finalists for the HGTV 2023 Designer of the Year award. But for Jeanne Collins '05 MBA, the honor is particularly poignant, as she is only three years into a design career.

"If you'd asked me 10 years ago if I would be an entrepreneur, I would have said, 'No! Not me,'" says the founder of JerMar Designs of New Canaan, Connecticut, and the author of "Two Feet In: Lessons from an All-in Life."

Collins had spent 11 years at a large corporation, working her way up to vice president of East Coast sales, when

she was abruptly laid off. "I was burned out from quarterly goals, unrealistic expectations, and travel," she says. "I was exhausted from the lifestyle, the lack of creativity, and values that didn't align with mine. I realized I might be dead if I kept doing this. I knew this was a time for change, that I had another 20 years to work, and the chance to make a significant change wasn't going to come around again."

She'd liked doing interior design work for herself and for family, so she went back to school online to earn two certificates in interior design. But she had

*"I had a passion for interior design, and a willingness to learn and be challenged. I knew if I worked hard and smart, I could succeed," says Collins.*

no portfolio to demonstrate her style — which uses design to create a sense of serenity and wellness in a home. So she posted to a local mothers' group in town and offered to redesign a room for free. In 10 minutes, she had 35 people requesting her services.

Today her work is in such demand that she can choose the projects she wants to work on. "One of the reasons people hire me is that I will push the boundary of what they think they like." The Executive MBA alum shared some lessons and tips with us in late 2023, in hopes of a serene and well 2024.

### 5 things I learned from reinventing my career:

- ❶ After you've been in a career for a while you tend to pigeonhole yourself, based on the degree you earned and the title you hold. I'm in sales, I thought. But I had so many more talents and skills than I realized!
- ❷ Don't think you have to know everything. Ask for help. Say: I'm new to this. I don't know how it works. Can you help?
- ❸ Networking is essential. Tell your story to everyone. You might meet someone in a field completely unrelated to yours, but her sister might be the fabulous accountant your team needs.
- ❹ Hire a bookkeeper. That's the first thing everyone needs to manage their entrepreneurial business. There is so much you need to know, and you won't have the time to figure it out yourself.
- ❺ Don't give up! If you feel like you're failing, hire a business coach who can evaluate what you're doing wrong.

### 4 tips for making your home a sanctuary:

- ❶ Make your bedroom a haven. When you open your eyes, do you want to see a pile of laundry or beautiful artwork? When your feet hit the ground, do they feel a cold floor or a warm rug? Are your lights dim and comforting, or bright and obnoxious? Think about your senses.
- ❷ Every home should have a quiet place

*Custom ceruse tables have rims large enough to rest your feet; the glass keeps them light in the space.*

*The vibe is a zen space with big splashes of color and patterns in the fabrics and artwork.*

*All the furniture sits on the rug to visually separate the sitting area from the dining area.*



*The dining nook allows for sitting and reading as well as eating.*

*This is a pool house designed to feel like a vacation at home with bright white walls, wide plank oak floors, and lots of windows.*

to read. Whether it is a chair in the office, a cozy nook, or a floor cushion, you need a quiet place, with an imaginary Do Not Disturb sign, to allow your brain a moment of calm away from the noise and stress of a busy household.

❸ Pay attention to how colors make you feel. I did a family room project early on. There was wood everywhere and a lot of yellow. We changed the colors to white, black, and soft gray. It was such a zen space. When you walked in you could feel yourself breathing more calmly. One of the homeowners said, 'I never knew how much the yellow and brown combination made me anxious. I didn't realize it until it was gone.'

❹ Where will the shoes go? The kids' coats? Where will you put your purse? Clutter causes stress. I like to add furniture that offers storage, especially at the entrance and exit of the home.

### 3 things every homeowner struggles with:

- ❶ The end vision. Most homeowners can't see the potential of a room or the advantage of taking a wall down, because they live there and see their homes as they've always been. I create a

cohesive flow from a design perspective, while keeping the rooms unique.

❷ Clutter. Thankfully the days of open shelves are gone. Today's homeowners want everything clean and clear. I recommend people do a deep de-clutter at least once a year and get rid of what they don't want. Do you have too many dishes? Donate them to people who need them!

❸ Emotional attachment. The older we get the more furniture and accessories we accumulate that have emotional meaning. We have souvenirs from college, beloved items from our children, gifts from our parents, and cherished pieces from our grandparents. When those things don't work in your home, I can recommend reupholstering the chair or adding a marble top to a dresser to give it a new life or a new purpose.

### 2 lessons I learned, and used, from the EMBA program:

- ❶ It takes a team to be successful. Find people with different strengths, skills, and ways of working. Becoming a team and learning to trust one another is the ticket to success.
- ❷ Don't quit when things get hard — 13

months into my EMBA, I wanted to quit. It was painful. I couldn't imagine one more Friday night or Saturday spent in class. I was so tired of homework, and that statistics course was grueling. But I didn't give up. It was important to me that I saw that commitment through, from start to finish. I use that lesson all the time in my life when something is challenging. I'm proud to have earned that EMBA! And when I recruited and hired people, I looked for that type of commitment and dedication. That ability to persevere and do hard things says a great deal about a person.

### 1 best thing about being your own boss:

Controlling my life on a daily basis is powerful and inspiring. As my own boss, I can control my level of stress, what I take on, who I work with, and what I'll do. If I work Saturday, it is my choice. Controlling my own stress impacts everything else in my life. I've met so many people over the last three years I would never have met otherwise, and that has been exciting and energizing. Being your own boss is just amazing.

—CLAIRE HALL