The Career Pivot: How Deborah Needleman Shifted Paths

Description

After spending nearly two decades as an editor for fashion and design magazines, most notably as Editor-in-Chief for T Magazine where she seemed to have reached a career high point, Deborah Needleman did something entirely unexpected: she quit her job and changed paths. In place of chasing flurrying deadlines and team management, Needleman shifted to a slower way of life, one focussed on herbal tea making, broom-making, and

basketry. She said, â??I wanted to do something more physical. I wanted to live more in tune with the seasons.â?• But what was it that prompted this move, and pushed her to take the plunge into the great unknown, having already built considerable success in an entirely different field? Needleman is one of many who have made such a courageous career pivot in mid-life, and her reasons for the change are an inspirational lesson in tuning in to oneâ??s inner voice, however terrifying it might at first seem.

Needlemanâ??s desire to change career paths came to her after watching a video where Annemarie Oâ??Sullivan was weaving a basket. â??It showed her harvesting willow, going back to her studio, working quietly on her own,â?• says Needleman. â??I just thought: thatâ??s the life I want.â?• Making such a dramatic life change was not an easy choice for Needleman, given she had never been a particularly crafty person. She made charts and lists, asking herself, â??What will I miss?â?•, which allowed her to be sure she was making the right choice. In turned out, her instinct to pursue something different was strong. â??From planting, to harvesting, to grading the willow, to soaking, to making, I just thought, this is it, this is how I want to live.â?• She spent a full year thinking and planning her career move, including a visit to Annemarie in her home in Sussex, noting, â??I never wavered.â?•

Just one week after leaving T Magazine, Needleman studied broom-making at the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina. Needleman also spent two weeks in Japan, where she researched traditional craftmakers including woodworkers, broom makers, katazome printers, and more, she saw first-hand the meditative wonder embedded in such skilled making. She said, â??The dedication of the craftspeople and the refinement of their work [was]â?¦ on a level beyond anything Iâ??ve ever seen.â?•

Working more and more with her hands, Needleman slowly harnessed her skills in basketry, tea-making, and broom-making, producing lovingly crafted objects from humble materials, many of which she harvested from her own garden. Although she trusted her instincts, she still faced obstacles along the way. â??Especially when youâ??re learning something for the first time, youâ??re thwarted a lot, and you have a lot of failure and a lost of frustration,â?• she confessed. Her spirit of determination was what carried her through these initial struggles, and still keeps her going today, observing, â??You realise that you have to sort of give up a bit of control and not worry about it too much.â?• Since making such a shift, Needlemanâ??s determination has pulled off â?? she has gone on to find considerable commercial success, something that might have seemed impossible before she took the plunge.

Her story speaks of the power in looking inwards, and deciding that if the life you are living is no longer fulfilling, change is possible at any age and life stage, even if it seems daunting at first. For Needleman, it has been about adapting her mindset to suit an entirely new way of life, by trusting her own inner instincts. She says, â??In part it was just this idea of â??I want freedom. I want to be able to make up my own day, every day. I want to be able to research things, learn new thingsâ??â?¦. I was *done*, as weird as that sounds.â?•

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