

Apogee

Insights

When Opportunity Comes Knocking

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"Silver lining of success for those who hear opportunity knocking." This was the title of a feature article in the West Australian newspaper in 2020 at the height of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The article focussed on four women and how Covid-19 had fuelled a positive career rethink and pushed them to explore new opportunities. I was one of those women, and as I sit to write this piece for the Empower Hub on Identifying Career Opportunities, I decided to revisit my interview with journalist Meilin Chew and share my reflections at the time the article was written.



In 2020 I was working full-time in a senior management role for a West Australian Government department. I was managing some of the State's largest affordable and social housing programs. I worked with a really dedicated group of people who were doing great work in the affordable and public housing space, but I knew it was time for me to move on. I'd been there for three years and I had achieved what I wanted with my teams and in the role.

I love the challenge of working in different industries and the diversity of different roles. I can get bored if I'm doing the same thing for too long. I am the type of person who is okay with pushing myself out of my comfort zone at work. This has served me well over the years. I have been able to take advantage of some fabulous opportunities and have been fortunate to have worked for some great private sector and government organisations. It has helped me develop a diverse skill set and experience in lots of different sectors.

I have always been very clear in relation to my career goals - whether that was climbing the corporate ladder in my 20s and 30s or stepping back when I had a family to focus on my children.

In March 2020, I was turning 50 and I was doing a lot of reflecting on my life and career, and what I wanted my work/life balance to look like moving forward.

Work/life balance is different for different people. For me, it's about being available for my family, especially my children whenever they need me; working in a role that challenges me and where I have an opportunity to mentor others.

I decided to leave my job with nothing really planned. I was going to take a few months off work, spend some time slowing down a bit and then look for a new challenge. I just felt like I wanted to take a break, reset, spend some time with my kids, who were 16 and 13 at the time, and then dive back into something new. I talked it over with family and a couple of trusted colleagues. I knew deep down that it was the right move for me, but I did need an extra push from a fabulous female colleague I was working with at the time and my husband to actually bite the bullet and hand in my resignation! This was the beginning of March and COVID-19 was just rearing its head in WA. We still had no idea what it was really going to look like in Australia or globally and some of my colleagues thought I was mad to give up a permanent government position with the future so uncertain.

Once it became known that I was leaving my role, I was approached by a few people asking me if I was interested in doing marketing, strategy and leadership consulting which is where much of my professional experience lies. I hadn't considered consulting, but these conversations planted the seed.

COVID-19 then happened, and we all went into lock down. With people suddenly losing their jobs because of COVID, I began thinking more seriously about consulting.



My discussions with various organisations progressed, and I definitely saw myself working with them in a consulting capacity in my future plans. Bringing strategy and culture together to improve organisational effectiveness excited me. Positive culture and strong leadership are critical for organisational success. Famous management consultant Peter Drucker's quote, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast" has always resonated with me so it seemed like a natural fit to establish my own consultancy focussing on bringing together strategy and culture through leadership development – my core competencies.

For me, the period in lockdown meant I had time to set up my business and write my own business strategy. When we opened up again and people started returning to work, I was up and running and I haven't looked back. Rather than focussing on the potential problems with starting a business in an uncertain time and what might limit my goals, I chose to focus on what could enable them. I had a positive mindset and was ready to take opportunities when they came along.

On reflection, one of the best things I have learned from this experience and throughout my career is that you can't base decisions on what might happen in the future. Prior to setting up my own business, I had what authors Helen Tupper and Sarah Ellis call a "Squiggly Career" (Tupper and Ellis, *The Squiggly Career*, 2020). In the world of squiggly careers we move frequently and fluidly between roles, industries, locations and careers. I found the squiggly career offered me opportunity, freedom and purpose. It enabled me to play to my strengths, build fabulous networks and explore future possibilities. It also saw me move from teaching to health promotion, marketing, strategy and leadership development as well as across industries including education, health, insurance, energy, rural supplies, property development, infrastructure, engineering and mining.

At this point in time, my squiggly career has led me to Apogee and facilitation of the Empower Career Success program. Every day I facilitate an Empower session I wake up with a feeling of excitement and anticipation at what the day will bring and that is the best feeling when you are heading out the door to work. Career opportunities are all around you. Focus on your strengths, identify what you enjoy doing, build a network of people who will champion and support you and then be on the lookout for opportunities when they arise. When they come along be brave and say 'yes' because you never know where that yes might take you.

To find out more about the
4-Day Empower Career Success Program by Apogee
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