



# DON'T RETIRE REINVENT!

BY JOHN TORSIELLO



Nancy Collamer

We live in interesting times. Many Americans, especially baby boomers, are still reeling from the economic downturn that began in 2008. Some need income and are looking for guidance on how to reinvent careers that were unexpectedly tossed into turmoil. Others retired but can't adjust, missing the stimulation of a career. As one commented on a job application cover letter, "My retirement was a mistake. Help save my sanity, and I will surpass your expectations." Still others have always wanted to do something else — a passion they never fulfilled. They're all looking to enrich Act Two.

For Nancy Collamer, a highly respected career consultant, speaker and author based in Old Greenwich, the timing for all of these groups couldn't have been better. In "Second-Act Careers: 50+ Ways to Profit From Your Passions During Semi-Retirement" (Ten Speed Press, 2013), Collamer, who specializes in semi-retirement career counseling, shows readers dozens of ways to turn professional expertise, personal interests and passions into part-time income. The book is filled with inspirational "second-act" success stories, how-to advice and links to valuable resources. It provides a roadmap for those looking to find more meaningful, fun and lifestyle-friendly ways to keep earning during their semi-retirement years.

Collamer's book is focused on helping those over 50 transition into not just new careers but into new lives, ones that are rich with personal, and to some degree financial, fulfillment. She interviewed over 40 people, a number of Fairfield County residents among them, and profiled 25 who were able to transition into new careers. In addition, she includes experts who offer advice on how to make dreams of earning income in meaningful ways during semi-retirement a reality. The profiles provide moving, personal messages that anything is possible, even when entering what some might still term a person's "silver" or "golden" years.

Author of an e-book, "The Layoff Survival Guide," Collamer explains how she came to write this new book. "My husband Joel and I were both over 50 and the kids had moved out. We went to a financial planner and, like everybody else after 2008, we saw how much the value of our 401K's had diminished. We had been slammed financially by the recession, and we were left to wonder what we were going to do down the road."

She continued, "I thought, if we are in this trouble, what are other Americans facing?" The statistics are startling when you consider that if you retire at 62 or 65 you may have another 25 to 30 years to live. The questions become, "What are you going to do with the rest of your life? Are you going to be able to afford your lifestyle? How are you going to thrive and enjoy life?"

As she conducted her interviews and research, Collamer discovered that it is indeed possible to survive economic uncertainty as a person approaches traditional retirement age. She also saw that, with the right idea, approach, persistence and dedication, it's entirely possible to build a new career and lifestyle once the curtain comes down on the "first act."

In private practice since 1996, Collamer seems the ideal person to offer advice to baby boomers. She gained national prominence during her tenure as the Career Transitions columnist for Oxygen Media. She has spoken at venues that range from Harvard Business School to the California Governor's Conference on Women. Her advice has been featured in numerous media outlets, including NBC "Nightly News," "The New York Times," CNN, "Redbook," "Ladies Home Journal," "O Magazine" and "Fortune." She is also a contributing blogger for AARP, "nextavenue.org" and "job-hunt.org." She has a master's in career development, a bachelor's in psychology and is certified as an administrator of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality inventory. A graduate of UNC/Chapel Hill, Collamer says she is the proud mom of two beautiful daughters and a "card-carrying member of AARP."

Once she landed a contract to write the book, it was flat out for four months. "I had only 16 weeks to turn it around, and this included a time-out for surgery." (She is fine.) It took a year to finalize the book and get it into print. Collamer is excited about the book because she believes it will help many people who, as they get older, are wondering what they can do to change their lives in a positive way.

She added, "Fear came up a lot in the interviews I conducted. But the people I talked to and use as examples of how to succeed in building a second career moved on and just fought through it. The one thing that I do advise is that individuals take some of the skills and knowledge from their first career and use them to their benefit in establishing a second career. If you were in business, use your marketing skills to promote your new career." Collamer found that many of the people she talked to had already started their second career on the side and others had always wanted to do what they came to do for a second career. She stresses that these aren't get-rich-quick schemes, although part-time careers can net anywhere between \$10,000 and \$50,000 a year and help stretch pensions and Social Security quite a bit. This can alleviate concerns over dipping into one's personal savings to pay for everyday life in later years.

Many of the individuals in Collamer's book transitioned into — for lack of a better term — "out of the box" second careers. She tells an amusing story of a 68-year-old rabbi who joined up with a Southern Baptist and a Muslim to launch the "Laugh and Peace Tour," which has become quite popular on college campuses. She also writes about a woman who had always wondered what she could do with her autistic son's paintings and decided to place inspirational sayings on the artwork. The business soon moved into t-shirts, note cards and posters. It's not only been therapeutic for mother and son, but it's also served to promote awareness of the talents and creative possibilities of people who are autistic.

In another example in the book, Collamer writes about how, after 20 years with the New York City Police Department, a woman switched careers when she was 50 to become a standup comic in an all-female entourage called "The Italian Chicks." Writes Collamer, "She readily admitted to stage fright at first, but she conquered that. She is very successful and is being considered for a television show." Collamer says that one woman who works as an extra on movie sets told her that there are many 20-year-old blondes looking for work but not a lot of 70-year-old women with gray hair, and moviemakers need them. "One agent told her to never change her hair color from gray because she can get more work that way."

Collamer also offers advice to those who want to give back to their community or country. "The Peace Corps is thought of as a young person's undertaking, but five percent of all volunteers are over the age of 50." She adds that one woman in her 60's started Recipe for Success, a non-profit organization that works to combat obesity among the young in schools. "It has become very successful, and it helps make a difference in the lives of others."

Collamer says her book is a "smorgasbord of ideas that are practical and inspiring. And age should never be a hindrance or a deterrent." The book comes out at a time when many baby boomers are wringing their hands over what to do now that their kids have left the nest, traditional retirement age is fast approaching or is here and politicians are arguing about the future of Social Security and Medicare. Her book is just what the doctor ordered for millions of individuals. She can be reached at [www.mylifestylecareer.com](http://www.mylifestylecareer.com).

*Profiles of Fairfield County residents who have successfully reinvented their careers during their Act Two, or those fulfilling their lifetime passions as side jobs, will be featured on a regular basis in this magazine. If this describes you, and you would like to be interviewed for this column, contact us using the contact form on [acttwomagazine.com](http://acttwomagazine.com) to tell us about yourself.*