



IN ADDITION TO PERSONAL THERAPY AND CAREER COUNSELLING, VOICE SPECIALIST AND PSYCHOTHERAPIST JAYNE COMINS HAS FOUND TEN GUIDES PARTICULARLY HELPFUL IN BRINGING ABOUT SHORT- AND LONG-TERM CHANGES TO HER PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIFE. JAYNE SAYS THESE HANDBOOKS HAVE GIVEN HER A WAY OF THINKING CREATIVELY ABOUT CHANGES SHE MIGHT BE NEEDING TO MAKE - OR IS VAGUELY AWARE OF - REGARDING WORK, FRIENDSHIPS AND LEISURE. SHE FINDS HOLIDAYS A GOOD TIME TO REFLECT ON LIFE GENERALLY, AND TO THINK ABOUT WHAT SHE'D LIKE TO BE DIFFERENT.

1. BUILD YOUR OWN RAINBOW: WORKBOOK FOR CAREER AND LIFE MANAGEMENT BY BARRIE HOPSON & MIKE SCALLY (MOST RECENT EDITION 1999, MANAGEMENT BOOKS 2000)

Packed with exercises, this A4 manual is designed to help you analyse and develop your skills, interests and ambitions. You interact with the book by filling in charts, questionnaires and boxes so you get to know your transferable skills, values and most comfortable career pattern for example. The personal profile you gain at the end of the book can be checked against jobs, education and training opportunities as well as leisure interests. The idea is that you see a greater range of possibilities for change. My first major career change occurred immediately after reading this book, thanks also to my manager at the time who supported me in making the transition.

2. GETTING THINGS DONE: THE ART OF STRESS-FREE PRODUCTIVITY BY DAVID ALLEN (2002, PIATKUS BOOKS)

My entire admin system is based on this guide written by an American management consultant. I read it three times before I got the hang of it, but it was time well spent and I've found the system easy. I've been using it now for about two years. It's unthinkable to go back to suspension files in filing cabinets. If you apply the principle one new file in, one old file out, or one sheet of paper filed, one out, you can manage the volume better.

3. SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO: HOW TO MAKE THAT CRUCIAL JOB MOVE DECISION BY JIM BRIGHT (2003, PRENTICE HALL)

If you've ever procrastinated over leaving a job, then this handbook helps you clarify the issues involved. Written by a Sydney-based organisational psychologist, you learn how to assess yourself and your organisation and also how to tell when you've gone as far as you'll go in the workplace you're in. There are checklists to decide when to take stock or move on, and whether your boss wants to promote you.

4. YOUR POCKET LIFE-COACH: 10 MINUTES A DAY TO TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE AND YOUR WORK BY CAROLE GASKELL (2001, HARPERCOLLINS)

This deceptively small book is big on ideas and activities. I like it because it feels manageable to complete and you get a sense of achievement early on in reading it. Examples of questions asked are: 'What are your three biggest achievements in the past few years?' 'What are your three biggest challenges?' 'What top three lessons have you learned?' It's the perfect book for reflecting, not just on work, but life in general. There are sections on boosting confidence, strengthening your relationships and tackling your obstacles. Great fun.

5. GROW - THE MODERN WOMAN'S HANDBOOK BY LYNNE FRANKS (2004, HAY HOUSE)

Male speech and language therapists may want to skip this one as it's specifically aimed at women 'who wish to get in touch with their feminine centre'. This public relations guru, allegedly the role model for Edina in the BBC programme 'Absolutely Fabulous', has put together an encyclopaedia of women's issues with entertaining exercises and advice. Ten friendly neighbourhood practices was my favourite piece of wisdom. Franks' ideas made me rethink and cultivate my sense of community and I now make more effort to be neighbourly. Having focused so much on work, leisure and close relationships, feeling involved in my local area has made me appreciate where I live much more.

6. STRIKE A NEW CAREER DEAL: BUILD A GREAT FUTURE IN THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK BY CAROLE PEMBERTON (1995, FINANCIAL TIMES PRENTICE HALL)

Having been impressed by a solution-focused career management day by the author, I was prompted to buy the book. If you just want to concentrate on sorting out your career, then this may be the book for you. There is plenty of information on the way careers are now and are likely to be in the future. The expectations you have of your working life are examined, as is your own fit with your job and organisation. By the end of the book you will have learned some skills for negotiating and managing your career.

7. FIND THE BALANCE: ESSENTIAL STEPS TO FULFILMENT IN YOUR WORK AND LIFE BY DEBORAH TOM (2004, BBC BOOKS)

If finding the right balance between the time you spend on work and time with your personal commitments is bugging you, then buy this book. The robust questionnaires manage not to irritate as many magazine ones do, and this is probably because the author is a chartered occupational psychologist. This book bears some resemblance to Build Your Own Rainbow (see no.1), but without the fun format.

8. YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SOLVING YOUR FINANCIAL PROBLEMS AND AFFORDING A LIFE YOU'LL LOVE BY ALVIN HALL (2003, CORONET BOOKS)

It goes without saying that, in order to make career or other life changes, you need to take into account your money situation. This guide helps you take charge of your finances without it seeming to be boring. I find a lot of women still leave it to men to take charge of financial planning and it's still the case that women are more likely to be in debt than men. One activity is to write down everything you spend each day for a few weeks or months, under columns, to work out where your money goes. I had a few shocks because I hadn't realised how much I'd been spending on snacks and subscriptions.

9. THE CONFIDENCE PLAN: ESSENTIAL STEPS TO A NEW YOU BY SARAH LITVINOFF (2004, BBC BOOKS)

This could be a good book to get started with, as it gives you a chance to build up your confidence and motivation first. You're asked to spend some time on working out what makes you feel good and there are activities to help you build up your energy level. There are also tasks to work out what drains you. I was less keen on exorcising your negative past and changing negative thoughts because it sounds like 'pull yourself together' - and, if you really have low self-esteem, therapy would be more creative. I hadn't thought about burning scented oils for helping confidence but I am using them more. I'm using lime at the moment, which is supposed to wake you up.

10. 1001 WAYS TO RELAX: HOW TO BEAT STRESS AND FIND PERFECT CALM BY MIKE GEORGE (2003, DUNCAN BAIRD PUBLISHERS)

If all the above is leaving you exhausted, then chill out with this chunky and beautifully illustrated book. Relaxation ideas are given for mind, body and soul, as well as for work situations and being with other people. The author lists numerous creative ideas for getting out of bed in the morning and winding down in the evening. Don't try idea number 308 in your speech and language therapy department, unless you want a phalanx of fire engines turning up outside your door: 'Purge your fears with a ritual. Write them on a piece of paper, and either throw the paper into the flames of a fire, or light it with a candle.' There are less challenging ideas, and it makes a great present.