



# *Should You Quit Your Dream Job?*

**YOU'RE KICKING SERIOUS GOALS IN A GIG YOU'D ALWAYS WANTED, BUT NOW YOU'RE CONTEMPLATING LEAVING IT ALL BEHIND - AND SO ARE A GROWING NUMBER OF HIGH-PROFILE WOMEN. BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO MAKE THE LEAP? WE ASK THE ONES WHO WALKED AWAY**

By Lizza Gebilagin



Every day for two weeks last year, the first thing Samantha Wills would do as she woke up was ask herself one question: "OK, you don't have a company now - how does it feel?"

If you're familiar with the name, you'll know how big the question was. Having gone from selling her jewellery at Sydney's Bondi Markets at the age of 20 to running a global empire based in both New York and Sydney, Wills was considering stepping away from everything she'd built. It wasn't that her business was failing. The opposite, in fact.

According to sources, Samantha Wills Jewellery was turning over \$10 million annually. The success she'd dreamt of was hers, but the 37-year-old knew it was time to move on.

"I just knew," Wills says. Which is why, before she told another soul about her decision, she asked herself how she'd feel if she didn't have the eponymous brand she'd spent 15 glamorous and "fucking hard" years building - one that was so intertwined with her identity.

"And it felt right," she says.

Wills is just one of many high-profile women who, in the past 12 months, have surprised us all by walking away from a business or career they'd become synonymous with. Sarah Wilson quit *iquitsugar.com*, while Commonwealth gold medallist Sharni Layton farewelled her netball career. So how did these women know it was the right time to bow out of their successful jobs, and what can we learn from their experiences when it comes to our own careers? Well, as it turns out, quite a lot, actually.

### OUTGROWING THE DREAM

First things first: your dream job is like a relationship in that it has to meet your needs. "So you need an understanding of your values and priorities," says Mary Hoang, founder and head psychologist of The Indigo Project. "You have to know what's *really* important to you." And just like in a relationship, when your own values and the ones of your professional S.O. no longer match up, the end is inevitable.

You could say it was a clash of goals that led to Wilson, 45, announcing she was closing *iquitsugar.com* a year ago, despite the fact that her own battle with an "endocrinal meltdown", and the subsequent sugar-quitting experiment that resulted in her getting better, had changed the lives of a projected 1.5 million people around the world. As Wilson told *WH* editor Jacqui Mooney on our *WH* Uninterrupted podcast, it might have looked like a crazy move from the outside, but "those who had followed my thinking from the beginning, and were part of the community, understood."

"Essentially, it was because to be able to keep going, I had to scale [the business] ... and to do that meant working to financial goals *only*, and I felt that was not the only reason I went into this. My job was done. I educated on [quitting sugar] ... and I was happy to hand the baton over to anyone who wanted to make money from it and hopefully do creative stuff with it," she says.

"It was the media and people looking in from the outside, who'd never read my books, who had a reaction that [my decision to move on] didn't seem like normal business behaviour. That's when I went, 'Oh, good,' if it shook things up a bit and got people thinking a little."

As Hoang says, "A job, no matter how amazing it is, is perceived differently depending on what your values and priorities are, so you need to do it for you." If the success you're achieving in your 9-to-5 is making it difficult to make a decision, Hoang adds that asking people around you for advice may not always help. Her recommendation? Chat to someone impartial, like a therapist or coach, who can help you re-evaluate.

### THE SPARK IS GONE

No one is saying that a dream job won't be a hard slog. In fact, "psychologically, something that we value is typically something that we work for," says Hoang.

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**The percentage increase in female entrepreneurs, compared with five per cent of males.**

SOURCE: 2016-17 GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP MONITOR

## Money talks

Breaking up with your dream job is stressful enough without having to worry about money. "Money is a very normal fear when thinking about leaving a job," says career expert Jo Green. Take care of the financial side first, so you can focus on more fun things (such as what you'll do post-dream job!). Green suggests:

- ✦ Working out a budget of how much you need each month to cover your basic needs.

- ✦ Knowing your expenses - this will help you decide if it's best to stay in your current role and have money coming in until you are financially ready to act.

- ✦ Calculating how long your savings would cover you if you decided to take a career break or pay for any study.

- ✦ Finally, knowing your budget - this will also give you an idea of how much you'll need to earn in your new career.

**I**  
**In another year,  
 women's salaries are  
 expected to overtake  
 men's in the UK.**

SOURCE: 2018 GLOBAL WELLNESS  
 TRENDS REPORT

But if you're currently wavering between leaving and staying, career expert and psychologist Suzie Plush suggests asking yourself, "Am I still excited to go to work?" Plush explains: "Is there a sense of excitement when you think about work or is it just draining you? That's a key question ... because when there's a sense of excitement, it's a good indication that you're heading in the right direction."

This was the case for Wills. "After I made the decision to close, I sat and traced back to where I lost that hunger, and it was about 12 years [into the business]. That insatiable hunger wasn't there anymore, and I think in a way, while I wouldn't even think about closing for another three years, something within me made peace with it at that time; something in my soul knew. It just took me three years to catch up," she says.

In the past three years, Wills looked at ways she could step away from the day-to-day aspects of the business and take on a board or advisory role. It worked for a while, but then she hit a roadblock when the company couldn't find a new creative director – a role she'd need to step in and fill. "It's something that I could have easily done ... but when I looked at that – really looked at what that commitment meant – I just knew my heart was no longer in it," Wills admits. She closed the business in January this year.

Wills' initial willingness to find new approaches to her dream job is what anthropologist Dr Sumant Badami of habitus.org calls "job crafting". "It's a way of tweaking the job that you're in so that it better fits your skills, motivations and interests," he

says. "This allows you to realise more of yourself through your work."

Just like Wills, it's worth workshopping ways your current job could better suit you, before making your final exit. Could you delegate duties you've outgrown or no longer find challenging? Can you create new projects to work on? The answers to these questions might help keep the dream alive.

## TORN BETWEEN TWO PATHS

What happens if you still love your work but have new priorities vying for your attention? "I think the real question [to ask yourself] is, 'What is this costing me?' What are you willing to give up in order to pursue [your dream job]?" explains Plush.

For writer Genevieve Rosen-Biller, 29, working 16-hour days was affecting her health. It didn't matter that her time was spent on work she loved (her day job at a wellness publication alongside her thriving French flax linen bedding business, Bed Threads) – it wasn't sustainable.

"For six months, I was working [at the publication] from 7am-3pm. I'd be home by 4pm, and then work

until midnight on Bed Threads. Ironically, I was working on a sleep brand *and* a wellness publication while my own health and self-care were neglected," she admits.

"Gradually I felt more and more exhausted – looking back, I was definitely running on adrenaline – and knew by the start of February [2018], I had to choose one or the other. I wanted to give Bed Threads the best possible chance to thrive."

It's paid off. "It has been an incredible experience creating and launching a brand and product from scratch," says Rosen-Biller. "I think dream jobs breed bigger dreams!"

So what do you do if you're in a similar situation? Letting go of something you love is tough, so it helps "evaluating the season of life that you're in", says Plush. "If you've got a demanding job, and your physical or mental health is being impacted, you might love your job, but the rest of your life is falling apart. Sometimes, you need to take a step back to make sure other areas of your life are in balance too." You could say it's the point where success and wellness meet – and we'll always be on board with that. *wh*

## How to reclaim your 'self'

Have you forgotten who you are without your job? As Olympic gold medallist swimmer and Toyota ambassador Libby Trickett shares, this makes it harder to step away...

➤ **It will be challenging.** "I retired from swimming twice – the first time was in 2009. I had no idea who I was outside of the pool, who I wanted to be or even what I wanted to do. I went through an incredibly dark period of depression for about 10 months and felt that the only way I could find my way out of it was by returning to the pool."

➤ **Learn from the past.** "The decision to retire again in 2013 was taken out of my hands. I had a severe wrist injury [and] I realised I wouldn't be able to get back to the level of swimming that I'd be happy with, so it was time to retire again. Thankfully, I felt more ready the second time."

➤ **Keep trying new things.** "I still feel like I'm transitioning [from swimming] and I'm over five years retired now! This time around I've had more patience with myself, plus a willingness to try new things [such as TV, radio and even sales and marketing for a tech company]. I'm currently working on an idea centred around mental wellbeing and physical health that I'm hoping to launch at the end of the year. But this has only come through taking on different opportunities and seeing where they lead!"