

# Life/Arts

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*'Everyone thinks they must have a plan. Just keep the vision and it will carry you. At the core of every success story is passion.'*

**MARY LYN MILLER**

Manhattan Beach career consultant, shown left





ROBERT CASILLAS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Mary Lyn Miller, founder of the Career Clinic in Manhattan Beach, teaches people to parlay their passions into dream jobs.

# Passion for change

By Meredith Grenier

STAFF WRITER

Imagine working 60 hours a week and providing daily fodder for a boss who dines on junior executives.

Or drowning in a 9-to-5 foreboreland of dead-end drudgery and boredom.

Then suddenly a voice says, "Follow your passion. It's the key to discovering the special, dynamic person you really are. And here are the tools to parlay this passion into the career of your dreams." It may sound like something out of the *Wizard of Oz*, but that's just what happened to 20 participants at a meeting of the Career Clinic's "power team" on a recent Sunday morning at the Hermosa hotel. They are on a journey to "pursue their passion," that began more than a year ago when they first met the voice.

Mary Lyn Miller, a dynamic Manhattan Beach career consultant and the clinic's founder.

After 60 seconds with Miller, you feel as though you've been jolted awake after a long sleep. In five more minutes your endorphins have surged exponentially. And by the end of an hour, you feel as if you can fly.

Her clients say when it comes to motivating people to "find their life's work," she walks on water.

## *Participants in career clinic find their life's work by following dreams*

Take Melissa Verdey. A year ago she was a professional pianist and songwriter who had blocked her musical creativity. Now she's written a song recorded by Michael Crawford that is No. 1 in Australia and has landed a writing contract with Warner Bros.

Christine Neelbitt was "in a coma emotionally" and had an indoor job. Now she's investigating ways to pursue her passion for the outdoors, maybe join an ecological expedition team or the Peace Corps.

Toni Taub finally is following a dream that she repressed since she was 12 years old. The would-be actress won a role in a junior college production of "Jesus Christ Superstar."

Miller greets the group, "Good morning," she shouts, winced for sound and pacing back and forth.

"Good morning," the group shouts back. As advanced students, they know energy

is part of the drill, despite the 9 a.m. hour.

"Welcome to the power team. Every one of you is involved with your passion. So the focus of this group is the ongoing expression of your own genius. . . ."

Clearly Miller is pursuing her passion, but her genius has been a longtime "work in progress," the term she uses to describe the process of "re-inventing yourself — building a lifestyle around who you really are."

Her clients run the gamut from students needing advice on college majors to retirees seeking second careers.

Arriving in California from Illinois in 1971 with a degree in communications, she jumped on the corporate fast track, becoming vice president for a financial management organization until 1975, when her daughter, Brandy, was born.

Between then and 1980, Miller co-owned a feminist bookstore in Manhattan Beach, sold accordion lessons and got divorced. In 1980 she opened a career consultant business, which was growing nicely when Miller was diagnosed with bladder cancer in 1986.

"I had to put all my energies into fighting cancer, so I had no intention of continuing my business. I didn't know if I was going to live, how I would make any



money, what I should do for work — the most basic things. All my life I had been told to get it under control, plan it. Now everything had just blown up.

"So I had to let go. But the miracle part of my story came when I concentrated on my healing, and out of that came this focus on inner self and what I am about."

As a result, 1987 was her best year in business, but she put in only one-tenth of the energy, because she was focused on "what is right for me."

"Everyone thinks they must have a plan. Just keep the vision and it will carry you. At the core of every success story is passion," Miller says.

Clients at The Career Clinic choose among a series of programs. Most include a personal history and career counseling tests to develop an "essence list" of natural gifts, talents and abilities.

Next she evaluates results, examines self-defeating blocks, identifies a new focus and develops strategies for change. Many clients participate in follow-up support groups.

"I don't encourage rash moves," Miller says, "because the minute a person says, 'I am going to change my career' and considers all the implications, he'll just go back to bed." She says the changing process is done in tiny commitments: This week I will pick up the 1,000-pound phone or do something good for myself, like meditate or go to lunch with a friend."

Advanced members in Sunday's power team had already developed their plans, and most had launched new careers. This was the first of a series of monthly meetings led by Miller to keep them focused.

Positive energy filled the room, although most participants admitted they felt every-

thing from "kind of nervous" to "terrified" to be there. Miller explained this was because their presence meant having to come to grips with their deepest fears — the very fears that kept them from pursuing their passion all these years. Fear of responsibility, failure, success, public speaking, fill in the blank.

"We are most resistant to the things we really are," Miller tells the group. "When we get in touch with what we are designed to do, it is frightening, because it makes us so vulnerable. The resistance is a sign to keep going. Carry on."

By way of introduction, Miller asks each participant to tell how he or she is feeling at the moment, what his life/job was like when he began the changing process, in what area his power and passion lies, and what he wants from the group.

With the unfolding of each story, individuals begin to bond more, offering words of encouragement, sympathy and plenty of humor.

One young mother says she hopes to gain a deeper knowledge of herself. "I have the fear of discovering my own power. When I started, I was in several horrible relationships in my work, within my family and with the man in my life. I was taking care of everyone but myself. I am the mother of a 2-year-old so — HELP," she said, throwing up her hands. The class laughed. They understood. Rita Catizone of Westchester says Miller should change her company's name, because it's about life, not just careers.

"When I started, I had a job and money, and I hated my life. I didn't know what was wrong and couldn't figure it out." In the end she left a job in sales, moved into the counseling arena and overcame stage fright to

pursue a career in the entertainment industry.

Ted Caligiuri, 34, of Hermosa Beach had burned out as a high-paid management consultant, constantly on the road. He chucked it all and spent a year in Asia before returning to set up his own consulting firm, which turned out to be neither satisfying nor financially successful. He found Miller's number in the phone book, and since then, he says, "things have really clicked along."

Tests showed he had all the qualities of an entrepreneur. In November 1991, Caligiuri started thinking about designing a bag that holds 40 pounds of groceries but can be rolled up into a tiny ball. Four months later he introduced the product, and today he manufactures a complete line of ecological products in his Gardena factory. Recently he was featured on CNN and is well on his way to building his own multimillion-dollar business.

Karen Cheeld was a quiet, gentle person trapped in an extroverted world and unable to get out. Miller helped her to end both the ill-suited job and a bad relationship, and today she's in the process of becoming a therapist.

Carrie Perlow was terrified of letting go of her job as a telemarketing executive. She had to give it up in pieces by moving from full time to part time. Today she is following her artistic

bent, working as an artists' agent.

Karen Delloso of Playa del Rey was selling truck freight. After working with Miller, she realized she was highly intuitive, which led to classes in biofeedback and hypnotherapy. Today she has a hypnotherapy practice in Beverly Hills.

Richard Lowman of San Pedro earned up to \$200,000 a year selling computer software. But he found his performance was erratic. "I didn't understand why, so when my wife suggested I go to Mary Lyn, it seemed like the perfect answer."

That was six months ago. Today he's inching toward a newly discovered interest in helping people heal physically — maybe chiropractic or kinesiology. He doesn't know at this point, and he doesn't care if it takes five years.

"Having a direction allows me to be more free. I understand why sometimes I'm bored. Now it makes sense that I'm always early to my martial arts class and rarely early to work."