

Second Act Careers

Through professional reinvention, four members of the Walden community achieve positive social change for themselves and others.



By Lindsay Downey

CAREER REINVENTION IS A HIGHLY STRATEGIC, executive endeavor, and for those in the Walden community who are penning new professional plans, social change is the intended profit. In a world in which people are living decades longer and retirement is becoming almost obsolete, more and more professionals are hungry for career transformation and are designing moves into entirely new industries—be it a switch from a 46th-floor boardroom into a middle school classroom or parlaying a passion for social change into a full-fledged entrepreneurial venture.

Preparing for the second act requires thorough planning and an unfailingly positive mindset, says Stephen M. Pollan, author of *Seconds Acts: Creating the Life You Really Want, Building the Career You Truly Desire*, who holds titles such as New York attorney, financial consultant, and best-selling author (and who returned to school at 58 to earn the bachelor's degree he'd passed over on the way to law school). From the music teacher turned disabilities advocate to the young real estate broker who found his true calling in psychology, here's how four Walden students and alumni peeled off layers of professional stagnation and created exciting second acts—so you can too.

Second Act: A life-changing endeavor that involves evaluating your deepest desires and designing a strategy to create social change and launch yourself on a more fulfilling professional or personal path.



Alyson Roth '05, M.S. in Education

ON A JULY AFTERNOON IN 2000, Alyson Roth walked along a winding, Sequoia-lined path back to her BMW. With her best friend Jennifer in the passenger's seat, Roth pulled the car out of Yosemite National Park and the women—both music education seniors at Samford University—began the drive back to Birmingham, Alabama.

At 5 a.m., Jennifer took the wheel. On a desert road 90 miles south of Las Vegas, Jennifer lost control of the car. Though she was wearing a seatbelt, Roth was ejected through the back window of the passenger's side door—and, in an instant, she was paralyzed. Following the accident, the petite brunette struggled internally to come to terms with her disability, but vowed to transform herself from victim to outspoken advocate.

After graduating with her bachelor's degree in 2002, Roth began teaching music at a low-income school near her hometown of Atlanta. She thrived in the classroom and began to adjust to life in a wheelchair, but continued to battle the depression she kept hidden. The outspoken young woman, who had fallen in love with California during her summers at Yosemite, realized she needed a change. "The accident happened and it seemed as if all my dreams and aspirations went out the window," Roth says. "Over time, however, I was able to see that life was still valuable and worth living and I decided to pursue that dream of living in California."

As she re-evaluated her life and prepared for her move to the West Coast, Roth knew she wanted to do something to angle herself more competitively career wise. She had always hoped to incorporate a core curriculum, such as reading, into her music classes, so Roth began researching schools through which she could obtain a higher degree. Because she wanted to continue teaching full-time while she took classes, the violinist—who grew up with a music teacher mother—knew online classes would be ideal. "Many of my colleagues had graduated from Walden, so after doing some investigation on my own and talking with them, I knew Walden would give me the best education with the flexibility I needed," Roth says.

In 2005, she earned an M.S. in Education from Walden. At a private school in California, Roth taught her music students the importance of treating people with disabilities as equals, even speaking at conferences about how teachers could better accommodate students with disabilities. But she knew there was more she could do. On a whim, Roth searched an online job site and was thrilled to find an opening for development manager at the California-based nonprofit Free Wheelchair Mission, which distributes wheelchairs to impoverished handicapped people around the world.

Through Free Wheelchair Mission, where she is the only wheelchair-bound staff member, Roth has worked with former Mexican President Vicente Fox to provide free wheelchairs to Mexico's citizens. She has traveled to Nicaragua to work at an orphanage for children with disabilities, taught music at a school for the blind, and assisted Habitat for Humanity in building a home for a disabled Atlanta resident. She has returned to Yosemite as a member of the park's board of directors to spearhead wheelchair-friendly enhancements, including a bus system with lifts, hand-powered bicycles, wider doorways, shower benches, and accessible guest cabins.

In 2009, Roth was crowned Ms. Wheelchair California, and judges chose her as second runner-up in the Ms. Wheelchair America pageant. The best day of her life thus far, she says, was surfing at Huntington Beach—nearly nine years to the day after her accident—as the first disabled woman to participate in the Hurley U.S. Open of Surfing.

Roth recently finished filming the documentary *Defining Beauty*, which features Ms. Wheelchair America contestants and is expected to premiere at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival. She is searching for a publisher for a memoir she's written about her journey. Through all her efforts, Roth is now educating more people than ever. "I'm not confined to four walls anymore," she says. "I'm able to use the world as my classroom."

SECOND ACT TIP:

Focus on finding your calling.

"Once you figure out what your purpose is, it's important to go after that," Roth says. "If you have passion, drive, and confidence in yourself, you can carry that into your next career."



AS A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT, Andrew Mogle (Ed.D.) student

got his first taste of the culinary arts working in a grocery store deli. He quickly moved on to restaurants, and by his senior year, he was cooking on a fast-paced sauté line in a busy hotel. Over the next 10 years, he moved to front-of-house operations at various eateries and it became clear that not only did Mogle have a talent for creativity in the kitchen, he thrived as a manager and took pride in training young employees. The man who constantly learned new recipes and experimented with ingredients realized his dream job would require him to step outside of the dining room and into the classroom.

After leaving his position as manager of an Olive Garden and returning to school at the age of 31 to earn his bachelor's degree from Iowa State University, Mogle began teaching family and consumer sciences at

Norwalk High School in Norwalk, Iowa. At the 700-student high school, he created the student-run Warrior Café, which allows teenagers to hone culinary as well as business skills in preparing meals, balancing food costs, and operating the café, which serves approximately 1,300 local residents each semester. "There are a lot of culinary programs around the country, but the business opportunity we attach to it is something different," says Mogle.

The teacher, who incorporates his love of history into the curriculum through authentic period meals—be it a taste of the French Revolution or Civil War-era cuisine—helped students expand the café to include a catering business, through which students prepare food for Chamber of Commerce events, church functions, and even local weddings. Students who complete Mogle's culinary program have the opportunity to transfer to the local community college having already earned six credits, which is equivalent to their first year of food labs. The student-run culinary ventures are so popular, students have moved to Norwalk because of it, and some of Mogle's graduates now work as restaurateurs, chefs, and managers as far away as Arizona.

In 2008, the state of Iowa named Mogle its Teacher of the Year for his inventive curriculum. And reaching that pinnacle helped motivate the culinary artist and instructor to take on a new endeavor himself—there had to be more he could learn to elevate the teachings inside his kitchen classroom even further. “Every day I learn something new from the kids, but I wanted the challenge of learning something new for myself,” Mogle says. “Having a doctorate and being a high school teacher, it’s not going to get me any more money, but it will give me the opportunity to use new skills and new information I’ve learned.”

Mogle, who previously earned a master’s degree from Iowa State, enrolled in Walden’s Ed.D. program in March 2009 and says he has already been inspired by the university’s dedication to social change. He’s always known his mission to educate doesn’t stop on the soup line or in the dining room, and his classes at Walden are helping Mogle search out new ways to evoke passion in his students. The State Teacher of the Year is currently analyzing his method of transformational leadership through in-depth analysis and interviews with other leaders. Eventually, Mogle hopes to expand the results into a real-world teaching model. He’s a classically trained chef, but his recipe for leadership in the classroom is always evolving.

SECOND ACT TIP:

Don’t put off planning the move to your second act.

“The decision isn’t going to be any easier or safer down the road,” Mogle says. “Make up your mind and just do it.”

Creating a Second Act Strategy

Preparation is the key to designing a new career, says Stephen M. Pollan, author of *Second Acts: Creating the Life You Really Want, Building the Career You Truly Desire*. In sharing his advice for Walden graduates, Pollan

suggests viewing the job change through an executive lens. “You do a second act the way you do a business,” he says. “When you create a business plan, one of the things the business plan does is it helps test feasibility. When you prepare a plan for a second act, you’re going to really know if it’s possible because you’re going to be out in the marketplace, looking to see how practical it is, looking to see how feasible it is.” Whether it’s fueled by necessity or desire for personal growth, it’s becoming more and more common for people to reassess their goals and enter new industries as they delve into second, third, even fourth acts. Here are some of Pollan’s tips for creating a successful second act:

- Write down your favorite places, most memorable life experiences, passions, and goals—no matter how impractical—to begin to distill the second act dream.
- Analyze your strengths and weaknesses.
- Develop a second act mission statement.
- Find a mentor. Reach out to people who may be able to help you get started on your new career path. Asking for assistance is not a sign of weakness.
- Resolve not to settle on your second act. You may be tempted to compromise your dream for the sake of practicality, but you’ll never be truly fulfilled if you only go half way.
- Think about the closed doors you’ll face during your reinvention—whether it’s fear of failure or feeling like your age could hold you back—and plan now for how you’ll overcome them.