

REAL SIMPLE

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GREENER PASTURES

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She traded the big city for the rural life she'd longed for.

Real Simple's advisers help her shore up her finances and establish a new career.

Who hasn't fantasized about ditching the city for the country? Good-bye, grime, stress, and soullessness. Hello, fresh air and simple living. Diane Wheeler didn't just fantasize; she did it. A year and a half ago, the 41-year old single mother packed up her infant son, Otis, and left New York City for Chatham, New York, 2 -1/2 hours north. A freelance film and TV producer, Diane knew that it would be harder to find jobs upstate and that her income would decline. Still, she wasn't prepared for the extent of the career and financial difficulties she would encounter.

Advisor: Nancy Friedberg, president of Career Leverage, a career consulting firm in New York City.

Overview: Diane must focus on developing new clients and lay out a long-term strategy.

1. **Create a mission statement for her business.** "Once she's done that, she won't feel so scattered," says Friedberg. One helpful tool: Kate Wendleton's book *Targeting the Job You Want* (Career Press, \$14), which includes exercises for mapping out a long-term vision. It's probably a bad idea for Diane to supplement her income via catering or renovation. It will only distract her from production work.
2. **Consider taking a part-time staff job for now.** Diane might pursue "cousin jobs" that draw on her marketable media production skills, such as public relations or events planning, at a company in the area. Ideally, she'd arrange to work there only three days a week. She can use the rest of the time to build up her freelance practice. "This would be just for the short term, to get some money coming in and get her stabilized," stresses Friedberg.
3. **Work harder on marketing.** Diane should create an information packet to give to potential clients that includes a bio, explains the kinds of services she offers, lists key clients, and describes past successes. "The very act of writing it will help her focus," says Friedberg. Also, she should move beyond word-of-mouth contacts by sending customized mailings to, say, 50 organizations in the area that might need her services.
4. **Figure out what the market will bear.** Research the range of going hourly rates for the kinds of projects she's pitching, and because she's experienced, charge at the upper end of that range. (Salary.com gives salary data for a variety of professions by geographic location.) On the other hand, Diane shouldn't be afraid to discount her work, for say, the first month of a project to prove to a new client how good she is.

5. Consider a commuter marriage for the next year. “For Diane and Steven both to build a list of new clients simultaneously will put great pressure on them financially and emotionally,” says Friedberg. “Since Steven’s income is steadier right now, maybe he can keep his business going in Boston for another year or so. That way he’d keep his cash flow and have more time to market his services in the Chatham area.”

6. Be patient. “Typically, it take three to five years to build a successful business,” says Friedberg. “Given that this is the worst market in a decade, she’s done really well for her first year.”