

Careers & Leadership: Bevy Smith's Takeaways On Career Reinvention

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FULL TEXT

A meltdown in a luxury Milan hotel while on a business trip in 1999 is what made Bevy Smith, then a successful 33-year-old fashion and beauty advertising director at Vibe magazine, realize she needed to switch careers.

Her job felt like the movie "Groundhog Day," she says, and the frequent travel was causing her to miss out on important moments with family and close friends.

Now the host of celebrity talk show "Bevelations" on the Radio Andy channel of SiriusXM, Ms. Smith describes her journey in her book, "Bevelations: Lessons From a Mutha, Auntie, Bestie," out Jan. 12. After other moves that included a stint as a fashion-advertising executive at Rolling Stone magazine, she finally made inroads in her dream field of entertainment at the age of 38, a late start in most industries, but especially in Hollywood.

The 54-year-old's second-career trajectory included hitting it off with Andy Cohen, the Bravo executive behind the "Real Housewives" franchise. He tapped her for TV projects and the radio show on his SiriusXM channel. (Mr. Cohen's book imprint, a partnership with Henry Holt & Co., published "Bevelations.") She also faced setbacks, including the cancellations of two television talk shows she co-hosted: "Fashion Queens," on Bravo, which ended in 2015, and the syndicated "Page Six TV," cut in 2019.

In her book, the lifelong Harlem resident discusses the racial-justice protests, her bout with Covid-19 and dealing with the death of her 95-year-old father, Gus Lee Smith, from the virus in April.

As the new year brings thoughts of new goals, Ms. Smith talked with The Wall Street Journal about career reinvention. Edited from an interview:

WSJ: Covid-19 has prompted or forced some people to consider changing their careers. What advice would you give on breaking into a new career when a lot of us are still social distancing?

A: Utilize social media. If you're looking to pivot, it's a really great tool because it can help you reestablish yourself in a totally different space. What I've found on social media right now is that people really are looking to help others. There are certain industries and certain people that are doing quite well during the pandemic, and what I've noticed is that those people are really wanting to help.

WSJ: What about people who were thinking about going into a new career before the pandemic and now they're in limbo – should they hold off until the economy gets better?

A: It really does depend on how risk-averse you are. I have a very high tolerance for risk. In the book, I talk about seven years between quitting my Rolling Stone position and getting to "Fashion Queens." Seven years! Do you have the stuff to let the chips fall where they may and stay the course and actually thug it out for seven years? Because it could be that long. It could be longer.

WSJ: You write about going broke between your old career and your new one. What tips would you give to people on their finances while they're embarking on a new career or reinvention?

A: I advise seeking out a financial planner who can help you. My financial plan was, "Oh wow, I have enough money to pay my rent for like two years." That was the extent of it.

WSJ: What tips would you give people who are miserable in their career but still have to show up at work while they have reinvention on their mind?

A: I leaned heavily on my friends. My best friend Aimee, I would call her every day when I was at Rolling Stone.

Every morning I would be like, "I cannot believe I have to do this." And she'd be like, "Hold on. It's not that much longer. You can do it. You can make it through."

WSJ: One of the "Bevelations" in your book is, "It Gets Greater Later." What tips would you give to people who are considering changing their careers and concerned about ageism?

A: I would advise surrounding yourself with young people in that space. There's a great new app called Clubhouse. Go into those "rooms" that are focused on the industry that you're interested in. If you're not in Clubhouse, do that on Facebook, do that on Twitter.

Don't be intimidated by the fact that they are so much younger than you. What I find is, whatever the young people are doing, there's always something we can impart to them to help them make their journey a little easier. And they appreciate it.

WSJ: What advice would you give to people who might have second thoughts about their reinvention plans because they're getting rejections?

A: As a salesperson, know it's just the beginning of the dance. You got in the room for them to be able to tell you no. Someone thought enough of you to say, "Yes, come in, we'll take the meeting with you." That's a big deal. That means you're on the right path.

Credit: By Ray A. Smith

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