



ANDREA KAY
Careers

Take a career cue from Dr. DeLeeuw

Several thirtysomethings have contacted me to complain they are too old to make a change or have “destroyed their chances” to have the career they want. My response: You gotta be kidding! Two old or tainted at 32 and 35? Some inspiration from Joseph DeLeeuw is what they need.

Joe, 86, is a pediatrician. He didn't become a doctor until he was 63 and had experienced a life of obstacles and setbacks that most people never encounter.

Born in Winterswijk, Holland, he came to the United States in 1939 as the Nazi invasion was inching closer. Married with a child to support and a new language to learn, he couldn't go to college. He started a store in Connecticut that was destroyed in an explosion. He began taking night classes, then decided to go for a college degree. At 57, he graduated magna cum laude and told his son, Dr. Paul DeLeeuw, “I'd like to go to medical school. Do you think I could go to your old school?”

Despite his son's recommendation, he was not accepted by that or any other American medical school. In so many words, they all told him: You're too old. By the time you finish your residency, you'll be 65 and ready to retire. Why should we waste a coveted spot on our roster?

Joe found a medical school in the Dominican Republic that would accept him. In a town with one paved street, little sanitation and dependable electricity, his son brought him Coleman lanterns to study his all-Spanish texts and lectures in the dark.

“Since my early teens, I wanted to be a doctor,” he explains, “to help people who are poor and sick. I'm sentimental and I just wanted to help people.”

Joe graduated at 62, and did his residency at Beth Israel Hospital in Manhattan. Working in the emergency room and on call every third night, he was up every morning for 6 a.m. rounds with his 28-year-old fellow residents.

At 66, Joe made his dream come true. He opened The Children's Clinic in 1983 in Dania, Fla., where he works seven days a week serving the poor, charges \$20 a visit and answers his phone any time of the day or night.

As a career consultant, I have met thousands of people from coast to coast and in all types of professions. Out of those thousands, maybe 100 of them are like Joe, doing whatever it took to create the life they had envisioned. Why so few?

Because the rest had excuses bigger than their dreams. They complained they didn't have the money to do what they wanted. Or three people had told them they couldn't achieve their goal because they lacked experience — so they trashed the idea. Someone told them what they desired was a pipe dream and they gave it up. They figured they'd be competing with people 20 years younger, so what's the point?

This business of dreams is never about the money or whether you've got experience. Your career is a personal responsibility. You either sit down and invest time in discovering what you want, then develop a plan to get that, or you don't.

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