

EAT

Leona Watson, 44, gave up a successful corporate career to follow her food dreams in Italy. Inspired, she left the suited world behind, and in 2002, started her own cooking school.

At the age of 32 I found myself sitting at my desk on the 27th floor of the telecommunications company where I worked, staring morosely at Sydney Harbour. I had a life many would envy: a top marketing job that paid good money and an office overlooking the most beautiful view in the world. But all I could think about were those gorgeous white sailing ships skipping over the waves. I wanted that freedom.

I knew I was burnt out. So I decided to take a three-month sabbatical and work out where I wanted to be. I jumped on a plane and headed to an Italian cooking school in a town called Tuscania. I had always loved cooking for people and that's all I wanted to do – immerse myself in food. On the day I arrived at the cooking school I wandered into an enormous Italian wedding and the family immediately took me under their wing. I stayed up all night, eating and laughing – there were huge bowls of zucchini flower risotto made with the same champagne we drank at the party. *Bellissimo!* I wandered through nearby orchards the morning after – still buzzing from the night before – and bit into a fresh peach straight from a tree. This, I thought, is what it's all about. This makes sense.

Every day was about food. I'd wake up early and head to the markets and buy fresh vegetables picked the day before, along with boxes of lemons to make my own limoncello. The scent of the cheese and prosciutto was intoxicating and I happily sampled them all. Then Lara, the woman who ran the cooking school, and I would cook up these huge platters of pasta, frittatas and veal involtini for locals who had dropped by. It was the first time I understood the importance of sharing food. Before that I'd only cooked individual plates for people. I loved how these giant platters helped people interact and laugh and talk about what they were eating.

I realised I wanted to be around food constantly – and I wanted to make people happy through cooking. When I came back to Sydney I told my manager I was quitting my marketing job. It was a huge leap. I had some money saved up, but it was still a risk to turn my back on my career. But I knew if I didn't follow my passion I'd regret it forever.

In 2002, I opened Cheeky Food Group, a corporate team-building cooking school, and I haven't looked back. We've had more than 35,000 people cook with us in the last eight years. Many have never picked up a frying pan before, but they end up laughing and bonding with their colleagues over a paella or a prawn flambé in a way they never imagined. One time when I turned my back, the whole group had linked arms and were singing as their food bubbled away unattended! It didn't matter. What mattered was that they were happy. And I created that atmosphere. It was then I realised I'd found what makes me happy too.

LEONA'S TIPS FOR PURSUING YOUR DREAM CAREER

1. Ask yourself what you'd do if you had a free Sunday. That's your passion. Then think about how that might work as the focus of a new business or career change for you.
2. Find two or three people who are also looking to make a change and meet regularly to encourage each other.
3. Before you go to sleep, spend five minutes imagining yourself in your new career and note how good you feel. Whenever you get the "wobbles", this will remind you you're on the right track. →



Leona gave up her career in marketing to work with her true calling – food. BELOW It was on a trip to Italy, where she enrolled in a cooking school, that Leona discovered her passion.



major life changes

ELIZABETH GILBERT

OVER 6 MILLION COPIES SOLD WORLDWIDE



As the film version of Elizabeth Gilbert's smash memoir *Eat, Pray, Love* hits cinemas, Alexandra Carlton meets women who travelled overseas to realise their dreams

Three Australian women, three holidays, three

BLOOMSBURY

australia

OCTOBER 2010

madison

madisonmag.com.au

\$8.20 AUS ON (inc GST)

Fashion special

8 KEY TRENDS YOU WILL LOVE TO WEAR

(plus spring's sexiest shoes)

MUST-READ

Do you have the money gene?

Eat, Pray, Love fever

Real-life stories about finding happiness

Drew Barrymore

PLUS..

Chloë Sevigny
Shia LaBeouf
Jason Segel
Abbey Lee Kershaw

Secrets of BEAUTY ICONS

HAIR, MAKE-UP AND MOJO

HOW TO FIND YOUR BEST FEATURE AND WORK IT!

AUS\$8.20
NZ\$9.40 (inc GST)
PP: 255003/07456

acp magazines



TRIED & TESTED: THE ULTIMATE FOUNDATION CHALLENGE