

Corporate conversion

Forced out or frustrated, many find satisfaction in new service careers

By Julie Balise

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When Elliott Kronenfeld was laid off by IBM in 2006, he saw an opportunity to switch from corporate to socially conscious.

The Quincy resident, 44, discovered that he could parlay the leadership skills he used in his former job as senior manager of organizational development into a new career in clinical social work. So, he returned to his alma mater, Simmons College, where he plans to graduate with a master's in social work on Friday.

Kronenfeld, who hopes to land a job in a hospital, said while the job market is stronger for social work, the pay will probably be about 18 percent of his previous \$200,000 salary. But the single father of two is not fazed by the pay cut.

"I would tell my children to do what you love, not worry about the money," he said. "If I was going to give them this message, I would have to do it as well."

Amy Bauman can relate to that. In 2001, Bauman was laid off after 12 years working in 401(k) development, 10 years at Fidelity then two years at a Waltham-based start-up. The layoff, she said, left her facing a massive home renovation, a lot of free time, and frustration toward wasteful resource use. The result: She started greenGoat, a nonprofit dedicated to reusing building materials.

"Like with so many people, frustration can lead to a very productive business idea," Bauman said.

Far from financial services, Bauman's new role pitted her against environmental unfriendliness. Among other projects, she has worked to reduce wasteful resource disposal at the Boston Children's Museum and recycling rusted shutters into set pieces at the American Repertory Theater.

"I think it illustrates the point that it's only trash if you call it trash," she said.

In founding greenGoat, Bauman left a \$100,000 salary for three years of no income. She funded the Somerville-based nonprofit by refinancing her house, using all her savings, and cutting back on personal spending.

When faced with the layoff, Bauman "decided to make lemons into lemonade," she said. To ensure a smooth transition, she suggests leaving the previous job on good terms, being realistic, staying in touch with employers, and being creative about your next step.

"If you really didn't thoroughly enjoy the job you've been asked to leave, maybe it is time for a new direction," she said.

Kronenfeld is happy he changed courses. While he has not found a post-graduation job, he said he looks forward to the flexibility and opportunity available within clinical social work. It will take time for his financial situation to recover, he said, but he has no plans to turn back.

"I may not be taking an airplane to work, but I've never been happier," Kronenfeld said. ■



Amy Bauman (right), who started the nonprofit greenGoat after getting laid off, carried plants with Beth Lowe of Grove Hill Gardens.