

# “Opportunity always looks like bloody hard work? – Why it’s okay not to have your career figured out

Research by SEEK shows that many Australians feel stuck in their current careers and don’t know quite what they want or how to get it. We spoke to Fi Shewring, an inspirational woman whose resilience, hard work and openness to opportunity has created an astonishing career path.

When Fi Shewring was a school student there was only one subject that she really loved: Art.

“My parents felt it was a waste of time and wanted me to pursue more academic subjects,” says the 59-year-old. Initially, Shewring failed “abysmally” at the academic subjects, but her parents were determined that she didn’t give up. “They kept pushing me to try again and eventually I scrapped passes,” she says. “I think it taught me tenacity, which has been invaluable.”

While she did train as an artist, Shewring has been employed in a variety of settings. “I’ve done all sorts of jobs, including being a library assistant, a postie and a revenue executive,” she says. “That’s another name for someone who collects tax!”

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**A chance opportunity turns into something more**

After falling in love with a painter and decorator, Shewring decided to work with him. Having previously employed a female labourer, Shewring's partner never saw gender as a barrier to being a tradesperson, but he was unusual in this regard. "Most other people were very stuck in the notion that this was 'men's work'," says Shewring.

Shewring eventually taught painting and decorating to women, and she realised that they thrived on physical work. "They found it exciting and interesting," she says. "I won an international scholarship where I designed a study program looking at the women who were currently succeeding in trades and pathways in the United States."

One thing from Shewring's study program was clear: A support network to connect the small number of tradeswomen in Australia was needed. "I was a bit reluctant because I knew this would be a lot of work and I was working full time and still had kids at home," says Shewring.

## **Pep and SALT**

In 2009, Shewring founded Support and Linking Tradeswomen (SALT), a non-profit organisation that provides a support network for tradeswomen, apprentices and women who wish to enter the trades.

In Australia there are around 5500 tradeswomen across the country. "Since SALT started, it has become slightly easier for women to gain apprenticeships but we still have a long way to go until there are equal opportunities for women in the trades," says Shewring.

Shewring doesn't shy away from the fact that establishing SALT was a huge amount of work. "I did it on top of a full time job because I was so passionate about it," she says. "It's easy to be an armchair warrior but I think actually going out and doing things is different. Being prepared to stick your neck out and put actions in place is important."

## **Considering a career change? Feel the fear (and do it anyway)**

Change is always scary and Shewring says she has never found a way to avoid fear. But that hasn't stopped her. For people considering a career change, Shewring says opportunities will always present themselves, but very little will be handed to you on a plate. "Opportunity always looks like bloody hard work," she says. "That's what opportunity is. Everything I've ever had that's been of great value has always taken a lot of hard work and a lot of tenacity."

Shewring currently works full time for SALT, but she has an eye on the future. "I'm doing the best I can to establish SALT so that it can continue without me," she says. "Then who knows what I'll do!"

### **Fi Shewring's advice for making a career change:**

- **Work hard and be tenacious**

"You have to work hard to achieve most things and very often things don't go smoothly."

- **Making mistakes means you're learning**

"You have to be prepared to learn as you go. It's actually better sometimes not to get everything you want in life. I think sometimes you gain a great deal more when you work hard."

- **Stand out from the rest of the crowd**

"Find a point of difference that's worthwhile to the employer and be prepared to send a letter even if they're not recruiting. Send a letter letting them know, 'This is me. I'm interested in working for your company'."

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