

Baby boomer burn-out



Heather Backstrom was a human resources staff member at Toyota Motor Credit Corp. but wanted to work in a field closer to social service. Now she's a human resources coordinator at Beach Cities Health District in Redondo Beach.

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These South Bay residents 'downshifted' — leaving their fast-paced career tracks in search of happiness



By Leo Smith

STAFF WRITER

It would have been understandable if Jim Micali's friends were somewhat jealous of him.

By the time the Manhattan Beach resident was 29, he had masters degrees in engineering and business administration from Stanford and UCLA. Micali had been a high-tech engineer at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Rockwell International. And he was president of two successful manufacturing firms he had turned around as a business consultant.

Status-wise and money-wise he was doing quite well. What a success and at such a young age, his friends certainly thought. How happy he must be.

"I remember being in the president's position

and going to work and dreading it—I was there, I was there early and I was going crazy because it meant nothing to me," said Micali, now 36. "I thought something was wrong with me. I had everything that everybody thought was great, but I couldn't imagine doing it."

On the outside, Micali was doing wonderfully. On the inside, however, something was missing.

Like many career-minded folks, Micali had come to the startling discovery that his job was not his life, that he felt unfulfilled. And like a growing number of his disenchanted counterparts, he decided it was time for a change.

"In hindsight, I'm pretty certain my priorities had been, job status and money," he said.

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— JIM MICALI,
left, of Manhattan Beach



Time for change?

Mary Lyn Miller, founder of the Career Clinic in Manhattan Beach, offers some basic steps to begin the search for a more satisfying career.

- Evaluate what it is that you enjoy, what you really love doing in life. A common mistake is to look only at your career. Hobbies, recreational activities

and natural talents can be incorporated into a new career.

- If your life involved doing more than one thing you cared about, how would that change your lifestyle? If your life is very structured, maybe more flexibility is in order, or vice versa.

- Think about what you would regret not having done at the end of your life and start doing it.

- Expand your concept of what a career is about. Maybe it's not just about one job, 9 to 5, Monday through Friday. Maybe it's a combination of things like consulting, a creative activity and part-time work.

- Money is meant to enhance the quality of life, not replace it. So don't focus on money first, focus on quality. If a new job offers less money, that doesn't

mean you're unsuccessful.

"What the industry was, what I was doing, didn't come into the picture."

Micali visited Mary Lyn Miller, founder of the Career Clinic of Manhattan Beach. Miller helps clients determine what is really meaningful to them both personally and professionally.

"As a guy from New York, talking about doing what you love, finding what you're passionate about, what you need in your life — as opposed to what external professionals say you need — was foreign," Micali said. "It took me awhile to

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mean you're unsuccessful.

- Expect fear. Any change forces you out of your comfort zone and fear is an important part of that transition.

- Go slowly. Finding a new career is a process that may take many attempts.

- Don't try to do it alone. Help from counselors can offer a fresh perspective. You may have preconceived ideas about what your career should be.