

# Stepping off the trodden path

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## Career detours can take routes as varied as the traveler

When people step off the treadmill, they have no idea where they will end up. The International Herald Tribune profiles three professionals who took the leap and landed on their feet.

### ■ It's mainly for the laughs

What's a management consultant to do when faced with sudden freedom? Grab the microphone and massage table, of course.

That's what George Corrigan did when the dot-com that employed him, i2 Technologies, dot-bombed in mid-2001. Returning to work was out of the question: Jobs were scarce and traveling three out of every four weeks over nine years had left him exhausted. But Corrigan, an Englishman in San Francisco, also had a green card after eight years in the United States, along with pocket money from selling stock during the boom.

"For the first time in many years I could do what I wished to do," Corrigan, 39, said. "It was overwhelming."

For a few months, he played tennis, reflected and reconnected with friends. Then his eureka moment arrived. Friends told him that he was funny, very funny, and that he had a nice touch. And the spark, the creative energy, the mystery of comedy inspired him. He also liked helping people forget their problems by making them laugh.

So Corrigan decided to try being a stand-up comic, using his observations as an outsider as material. His act parodies the frustrations that foreigners face in filling out immigration forms, with witty examples of word confusion between "two countries separated by a common language."



George Corrigan, once a dot-com consultant, now does stand-up comedy in the San Francisco area. Peter DaSilva for the International Herald Tribune

"I am a Brit in America," he said. "The more you get into the country, the rarer and weirder you are. It's a fairly rich mine."

He approached comedy like a business project. He read up on it, flew to Los Angeles for an intensive course in comedy school and benchmarked himself against his peers.

He canvassed clubs, participated in open-mike nights at clubs like the Deluxe Café in The Haight district and got his first paying gig a year after starting. With friends, he filmed a short film that was shown at the Sundance Film Festival. And in 2003 Corrigan was voted the funniest guy in the San Francisco Bay Area in the "Battle of the Bay."

Corrigan likes comedy for its creative and immediate feedback. High points include fan mail, chatting with an audience after the show and the occasional autograph request in clubs outside the city. Venues have included a nudist colony, a reha-

bilitation center and a steakhouse. When he was self-employed, all of these gigs covered his rent, Corrigan said.

Massage, which he tackled a year after starting his comedy career, was also a healing, transforming experience — particularly in massage school, where training involved giving and getting two massages a day.

"I'm an engineer, an MBA and a Brit," he said. "Touch is a professional liability."

But, like in comedy, there is immediate gratification.

"You touch people both literally and metaphorically, at a deep level," Corrigan said. "That's a beautiful thing. At some point you have to touch people's lives."

He ultimately gave up on the massage table because of the bureaucracy, the lack of a spare room in his apartment and the time it took from comedy.

And after two years of self-employment, Corrigan circled back to an office job, lured by medical benefits and daily interaction with people that could fuel his creative drive. An opportunity presented itself with a salary that was lower than that of his earlier job but with 9-5 hours that enabled him to continue his craft.

Now Corrigan passes a 40-hour week doing sales development work for Starmine, a company that rates Wall Street analysts.

He also spends about 12 hours more weekly preparing for, driving to and delivering his comedy show, which is dispersed between open-mike nights during the week, clubs in cities north of San Francisco and the occasional weekend show in Washington state.

He is doing corporate shows, too, as a sort of master of ceremonies and head whiskey taster for Glenlivet promotional events.

In the future, he will most likely veer toward the latter because those shows are more lucrative and allow him to interact with eccentric types in a country club setting.

Corrigan said he was happier with a day job because it feeds into his comedy routines. Before, a sense of isolation and urgency crimped his creativity.

"To bring passion to life you need oxygen," he said. Now the pressure of completing office projects and the fodder gleaned from daily interaction with colleagues help Corrigan focus on comedy scripts after office hours and supplies him with material.

For him, the rewards of making people laugh are beyond measure.

"You don't want to die without any songs left inside you," he said. "Leap joyfully forward."

—Carolyn Whelan

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