

2023 Distinguished Executive Alumnus

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Recently, Tessa White discovered a bucket list she wrote nearly 15 years ago. For many, a bucket list is a placeholder for dreams—the things we'll get around to doing someday. It's a source of dismay when it reminds us of our dreams yet unrealized. But for White, it caused dismay because she realized she needs to write a new list, since she has accomplished almost everything on the current one: write a book, make money on the internet, appear on television. She still needs to visit a few continents, which means driving in unfamiliar places. This terrifies her, which is fortunate because doing at least two things every year that scare her is also on the list.

Precious time, and how best to spend it, has been on her mind since turning 50. "I subconsciously thought of all the things I said I was always going to do in life, and realized that getting them done would require me to take a different path than

I'd taken before," says White, whose straight-talk style of business advice has earned her more than one million followers on social media since she founded The Job Doctor in 2019 to help individuals and companies achieve their full potential.

Reflecting on her twenty years as a top human resources executive and often the only woman in the boardroom, White says, "I tried to live a very deliberate life. I colored inside the lines. I excelled at HR, and I stayed on that path. But at 50, I started to wonder if I could be good at other things as well. It was like a switch suddenly went off and I wasn't afraid anymore to do all the things I always said I was going to do, and with reckless abandon. What's so fascinating is that having a shift in attitude and not being afraid to fail has allowed me to experience some incredible things. It has really been a Renaissance period for me." Unlike the champions of the Renaissance, White's period of professional rebirth has not meant the death of all that came before; rather, the self-described "reformed Fortune-50 executive" has only laid to rest her desire to color inside the lines, turning her professional expertise to the more realistic forms and vibrant colors of human potential, dignity, and wisdom.

Now, her purpose is helping others create the financial success and work-life balance to pursue greater personal fulfillment. Individuals and companies turn to The Job Doctor for help developing essential workplace skills like conflict management and resolution, honest communication, and maintaining a sense of control to stave off burnout. She shares her insights through a variety of individual and group settings, social media platforms, and a weekly podcast. White's bedside manner is effective because she understands that discomfort offers valuable growth. During her long transformation from awkward, plain 8-year-old to beautiful, fashion-savvy buyer for her father's clothing company at 16, she developed confidence, honed her natural ambition, and embraced the responsibility and excitement of being in business. A visionary with creative flair, her unconventional leadership style of finding joy and opportunity in difficult circumstances transformed her a second time, from struggling 30-year-old single mother of three to successful HR executive.

From her vantage point in the C-suite, she saw both employee and employer perspectives on the (dis)incentives that drive the cycle of conflict avoidance and broken communication that leads to burnout and job hopping. Like a tiny bandage on an oversized wound, changing jobs restores one's sense of control and relieves the burnout only temporarily, but then the cycle repeats itself. White's belief that she could interrupt this pattern began her metamorphosis into the successful entrepreneur and social influencer she is today.

"I would have loved a Job Doctor to help me navigate the workplace. But I had to learn these things the hard way—on my own." White's only professional regret is not starting her business fifteen years earlier.

Many can benefit from the advice she would give her younger self:

Embrace your gifts. Love them, nurture them. They're yours for a reason.

Accept discomfort. Let it change you into something better.

Assume positive intent in others, and be willing to communicate honestly.

See conflict as an opportunity to advocate for yourself.

Take more risks.

"I always tell my children to have twenty seconds of courage, as often as possible. Those twenty seconds can put you on a new path in life. I've found that it's those moments when I don't play it safe that I get the most out of my life." Like the time she watched a hillside of lemon-colored flowers sprout wings and fly away in what may have been the Yellow Emigrant Butterfly Valley, far from any traditional tourist hiking path in Taiwan. "It was just magical. It felt restorative, and transformative in a way. There's so much adventure in living."

And adventure will always be on her bucket list.