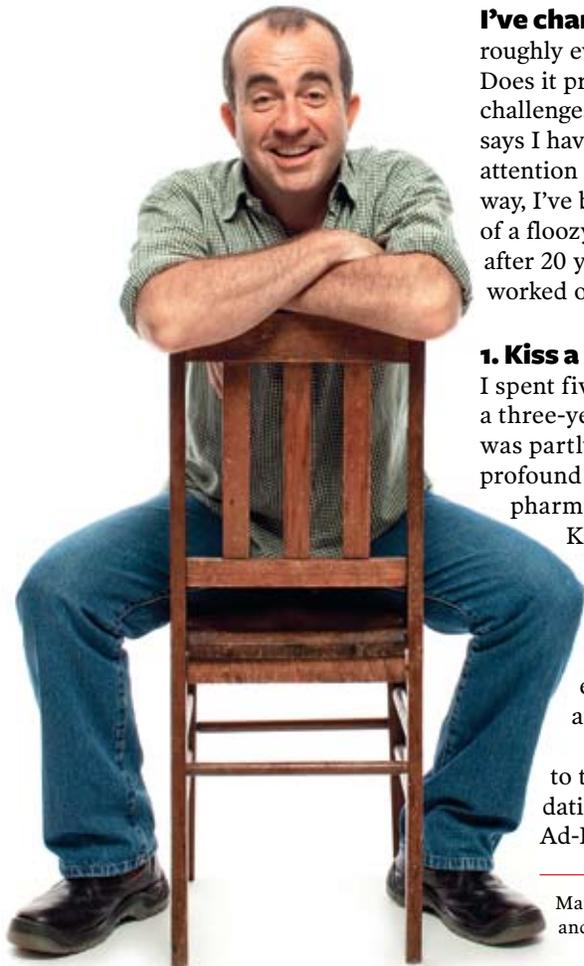


About finding the right job

Marty Wilson wanted a compatible, lifelong career. It just took him a while to settle on one



I've changed occupation roughly every four years. Does it prove I love new challenges? My mother says I have a short attention span. Either way, I've been a bit of a floozy. But, after 20 years, I think I've finally worked out how to find true love.



1. Kiss a lot of frogs – but do tell

I spent five years bumbling through a three-year pharmacy degree. It was partly because I had a deeply profound romance with the pharmacy faculty's home-brew Kahlúa recipe (sugar, vanilla, coffee, glycerine and 20% pure ethanol – e-mail me). But mostly I just wasn't all that enamoured with becoming a pharmacist.

After that I did what I like to think of as "career speed-dating". Then I moved into Ad-Land, where I discovered

Marty Wilson is a stand-up comic and professional speaker.

PHOTOS: TIM BAUER; ILLUSTRATIONS BY REG LYNCH

they actually pay you to make stuff up. Seriously.

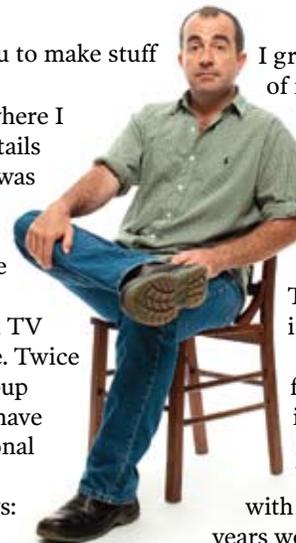
The first agency where I worked was all ponytails and Apple Macs. (It was the late '90s). I was lead creative on the NRL account, and we were changing the world one 30-second TV commercial at a time. Twice a year we'd have rev-up sessions that would have made even motivational guru Tony Robbins declare "Sheesh, guys: lighten up."

One day I mentioned that I wanted to give stand-up comedy a go. Someone piped up, "Awesome, I've got this flyer." I read it out loud in front of the whole agency: "Virgin Sacrifice. Learn Stand-Up Comedy in Six Weeks. Starts Monday."

It was as if I was trapped in a movie scene where all eyes turned to me, and the camera zoomed in on my face. Now I realise that if you dare to tell people you're not happy, there's a good chance doors will open up out of nowhere.

2. Use the benefit of (other people's) hindsight

I took the course and did my first stand-up gigs. They went pretty well, but I knew I had a lot to learn.



I grovellingly approached some of my favourite comics at the time: Pete Berner, James O'Loughlin, Akmal Saleh and Kitty Flanagan. I bought them a coffee, beer or slice of baklava and begged for their wisdom. They were all modest and all incredibly generous.

Peter Berner gave me fantastic ideas about improvising, so I could turn my very scripted act into one based mostly on just chatting

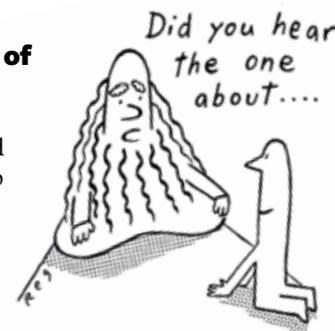
with the audience. He'd spent years working hard to figure this out for himself and shared this wisdom out of the kindness of his comedy heart. Thanks, Pete.

On a trip to Ireland, comedian Adam Hills told me, "Never lose your temper at the audience. It shows you're out of control, and you have to be the alpha male in the room." That one little hint was to save me a hundred times over.

At school we're told copying is bad. In life, however, copying is good. At work, it's the greatest shortcut to success. So swallow your ego, forget about self-help and move into team help. You won't regret it.

3. When you know, you know

As with love, when it comes to a job, never ignore gut feelings.

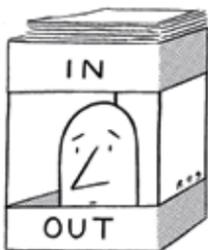


It's always a mistake. When I came back to Australia after being a stand-up comedian in the UK for seven years I thought I needed job security and "got back with my old girlfriend" – advertising. Huge mistake.

I stumbled along for a while, telling myself it was right to "play it safe" and earn a wage. But I just got more and more frustrated because the long hours of Ad-Land meant I couldn't turn the success of my first published book into a career as an author.

Then, in late 2008, on the last Sunday of a family holiday, I went for a run and listened to an audio book about how, just before success, everything always gets really, really, truly hard. Something shifted inside my noggin. My play-it-safe inner voice was desperately pleading, "You don't believe this stuff, you big goose." Then, before I could stop myself I was standing on some rocks looking out to sea and shouting to God, the waves, the universe, and two terrified fishermen only 15m away: "FULL-TIME WRITER! WITHIN 12 MONTHS!"

Then I gave the horizon my best Clint Eastwood, steely-eyed glare and shouted, "You, whomever is



listening, MAKE... IT... HAPPEN...!"

Incredibly proud that I'd managed, even in a peak emotional state, to remember to say "whomever", I jogged back and we drove home.

The next day I got fired. No warning, just a "You don't fit in. See ya." They were right, of course.

Gingerly, I rang my wife from the car park. Her response was exactly what my heart had been trying to tell me, "Fantastic. You hate it there. Now you're a writer."

4. No-one ever said: "How time flies when you're playing it safe"

Christina Leonard is a saxophonist who plays with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. She summed all this up perfectly for me, "When people tell me they hate their job I say, 'What? You think you're going to live forever? If you're not doing something you love you're missing the whole point of life.'"

Writing doesn't pay as well as advertising yet, but I know it will. Because in my wallet, next to a photo of my wife, I have something else that gets me grinning like a big goofy goober in love. A business card that says: "Marty Wilson, Author."



Marty