

**Sandy Schussel, a lawyer by training, was just about back on his feet in 1993 after more than a year of cancer treatments.** Healthy again, he needed to get back to work, but balked at the prospect of picking up where he had left off. "I was unable to function for a year," he recalls.

"There was chemo, radiation, complications from a first surgery. During that time I did try to restart my law practice, but after a year I had lost a lot of clients. I was faced with the miserable prospect of doing what I hated, and starting it up all over again." Schussel found the courage to move in another direction, and courage, he says, is what it takes to go for the work you love.

"Everybody's afraid," he says. "When you're a kid, your mom calls you back when you go out of your safe neighborhood." Pretty soon, just crossing safe boundaries causes sweaty hands and a racing heart. "It saves your life as a kid," he says, "but as adults, when we have some goal that is beyond our 'safe neighborhood' we back away, mixing fear with its little cousin, guilt. We need to learn and practice a new response."

On Tuesday, September 17, at 7 p.m., Schussel – now working full-time as a sales trainer for a financial services company, and moonlighting as a consultant, personal coach, and writer – speaks on "Live Your Dreams" at the Princeton Radisson. He repeats the free workshop on Wednesday, September 18, at the same time and place. These free workshops serve as an introduction to Schussel's "Three Nights in October Coaching Workshops." Also taking place at the Radisson, and beginning at 7 p.m., these three-session workshops seek to focus participants on pursuing goals and dreams. One series of workshops begins on Monday, October 7, and the other on Tuesday, October 8. Cost: \$389. Call 888-289-5551.

Schussel is eloquent on the downside of a career as a lawyer. "Early on, it became clear to me," says the graduate of the New England School of Law (Class of 1976), "that it was a profession filled with unhappy people. There are long hours, mountains of paperwork, droning work, endless arguments, and then you fight to get paid for it." In the beginning, says Schussel, he saw himself as a white knight, out

to save the world. Soon, he found himself sitting around outside courtrooms in the company of unhappy clients, facing off against unhappy lawyers in front of unhappy judges. Still, he was "too afraid to move." He had studied for years to become a lawyer. He had a family. He had clients. "I wanted out, but I couldn't get out," he recalls. "Then I was diagnosed with cancer. I believe my immune system was saying 'if this is what life is going to be like, let's quit now.'"

Schussel's choice of law was based largely on a fantasy – law as practiced on television – and on disappointment over an acting career that was going nowhere. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania (Class of 1972), he "went to New York to be a star on Broadway." After six months of rejection, he was discouraged enough to consider other options. "What do you see yourself doing?" a friend asked. He recalls answering, "being one of those lawyers on TV." Looking back, Schussel says he might have made it as an actor if fear of this notoriously difficult career hadn't pushed him toward something safer.

After recovering from cancer, he began his move, one step at a time, toward a career more in line with his talents. Finding that collaboration was much more his style than confrontation, he started doing some consulting. In truth, he says, he had been acting as a consultant even when he was practicing law. He had one client, for example, who was always being sued by customers. When customers tried to return something, his client blew up and refused to take the goods back, whereupon – with great regularity – he was sued. Schussel convinced this client that it would be in his best interests to bend a little and take some of the stuff back. This meant less repeat business for Schussel, but he found satisfaction in seeing the client break his self-destructive cycle. When he decided to escape from the practice of law, Schussel did more business consulting. He had already learned a good deal about the workings of small business through his legal practice, and learned more by helping his wife, Hannah Schussel, open Toys...The Store, a toy store on Palmer Square. "I wanted a business where people are happy – and they pay on the spot," the former lawyer says of the venture. His wife, who had worked in a clothing store on Palmer Square.

has been in charge of day-to-day operations from the beginning. Schussel contributed marketing and operations advice and worked on training employees. He then started holding seminars. Clients included retail mall managers, travel industry professionals, toy manufacturers, and the state of New Jersey. His topics revolved around leadership, customer satisfaction, and employee training and motivation issues. He also took work as a teacher in New York University's School of Continuing Education, teaching marketing management and entrepreneurship. At the same time, he was building a private coaching business, which he maintains today, although, he notes, "there was no coaching then, it was called `consulting.'" "At one time I was doing 10 different things," Schussel recalls happily. He found every one of his new gigs far more satisfying than the practice of law. Still, constantly drumming up business was time consuming, and he started casting about for a steady paycheck. Fresh from a career as a lawyer, he could not even earn consideration for a job in corporate training, the area he decided was most aligned with his interests and abilities.

But after several years of leading seminars, consulting, and teaching, he had proved himself, and landed a job as a national sales trainer. Through self-education, Schussel has moved himself most of the way from job hatred to job nirvana. But he still has a short way to travel. "I want to be a motivational speaker," he says. "That is my brass ring."

Going back to childhood visits to the Coney Island amusement park, he vividly recalls the handsome painted horses on the carousel. And he recalls watching the big boys leaning far off the tall horses to reach for the rings hung along the rail, high and to the right. One in ten on the rings was brass, and the child who grabbed it won a free ride. He was only five when his family took him to ride on the carousel, but Schussel grasped the lure of the brass ring right away. "That was adventure, passion, joy, fulfillment," he says. Although he has been coaching and consulting for nearly a decade now, Schussel has just incorporated his Princeton-based business, naming it Brass Ring Consulting. The workshops he hosts this month are his final steps in banishing the fear that kept him indentured to a job he hated for nearly 20 years. For while he has led

seminars, this is the first time he addresses the public as a motivation speaker. His message is that everyone can – and should – reach for a brass ring. (His 15-year-old daughter is following her father's advice. Under the name Madeline Blue, she is pursuing a career as a professional actress – U.S. 1, May 29, 2002). Here is Schussel's advice on how to pull down the prize:

Analyze your situation. Maybe the career is not so bad. Maybe the problem is that you are in a large bureaucracy, when a small company culture would be a better fit. Maybe you are practicing a branch of the career that chafes, and another would be a better fit.

Start thinking of possibilities. You need to act if you are convinced that your career is making you miserable. But not everyone can quit a miserable job today, Schussel acknowledges. A first step is to start thinking about exactly what would constitute a better job. "This is your life," he says. "You don't know how long it's going to be. You might as well make every minute something you want to live."

Identify bridge skills. "Start exploring the positive side," Schussel advises. A consultant might hate prospecting for clients, but might enjoy giving presentations. A lawyer might hate court room wrangles, but might enjoy legal research. Look for elements you like in your current job – or in jobs you have held in the past.

Construct the bridge. "You want to leave your job without plunging into poverty," says Schussel, "and there are probably 1,000 ways to do that." Take one small step, he urges, then add as many steps as you can. For example, he says, if you know you want to teach, do some research. After you find out what licenses you need and what courses you have to take, sign up. Start building the infrastructure that will take you where you want to go.

"The main thing," says Schussel, "is to take action. If you take action, it means that you are not paralyzed." Many times, people remain stuck because they are afraid of making a career mistake – again. Don't sweat it, says Schussel. "Get over the concept that there is a perfect choice," he says. "You can switch again."