

Work's like a DREAM

It takes guts and self-belief to start a new career, but in a recession? Zest meets three women who prioritised their happiness in the riskiest of times

'I DITCHED FINANCE FOR FLOWERS'

After dreaming that she ran a florist, Kally Ellis, 50, from London, did just that - at the peak of the 90s recession

I'm the youngest of four girls. And while all my sisters went to art college, I rebelled and pursued a career in banking, using the languages I'd studied at university to work for a French bank. But banking isn't exactly creative and eventually the nine-to-five slog really got me down. To add to that, in a short space of time everything in my life changed for the worse - I split up with my boyfriend, my best friend died and I had to move back in with my parents. I'd hit rock bottom and couldn't see a way out. Then out of nowhere, a work trip to Paris threw up an unexpected glimmer of hope.

I'd gone out to buy a bouquet for a friend, and stumbled across a shop selling the most beautiful flower arrangements I'd ever seen - just simple hand-tied tulips and roses, but they were stunning. I hadn't seen anything like that in London - back then, flowers were all boring, flat-backed arrangements.



Kally's talents brighten up A-list parties

I couldn't get the flowers out of my head and soon afterwards I had the most incredibly vivid dream. I was in a flower shop - my shop - surrounded by hand-tied bouquets. I woke up feeling happier than I had in a long time. This was a sign. Work and life had got so bad, the only way was up, and the dream gave me the focus I really needed. I walked into the kitchen and announced to my parents, "I'm going to be a florist!" They thought I was barmy.

Over the next few months, I threw myself into my dream and thought

about nothing else except the shop. The 1990 recession was at its peak, so I took voluntary redundancy at the bank and bought a very small flower shop, McQueens, which was about to go under. All my banking friends thought I was mad and kept telling me "No-one starts a business in a recession!" But I had such faith in my plan that, despite

the very real financial risks, I didn't doubt my instincts for a second. To me, all the fundamentals were sound - the central location was key because so many people travelled past there every day and there were no decent florists in the area. Plus, with all the doom and gloom, I felt people needed something to make them feel better. Flowers have so many proven wellbeing benefits after all, from boosting

happiness to making you more productive at work. It couldn't go wrong.

That's not to say I didn't have lots of learning to do though - yes, I owned my own business, but I wasn't too proud to hold my hands up and admit that I had a

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long way to go. So, while doing up the shop, I worked at a garden centre to get some hands-on experience. And I immersed myself in the industry - finding out who the good suppliers were, and volunteering with legendary florist, Paula Pryke, so I could learn on the job. Even hearing how traders didn't want to open accounts with me because of the old shop's reputation didn't put me off. I was