

From left: Phil, Norah, Chris, and Jeremy changed direction and found success.

The first step to finding your dream job: Know what makes you happy. Meet four people who proved it.

BY SARAH WEXLER

# Guided By Bliss

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIN PATRICE O'BRIEN

**Late last year**, we planned to run an excerpt from a terrific book we're publishing this month: *The Bliss List*, by J.P. Hansen. Reading it is instantly cheering: It tells you how to achieve your career goals by first identifying the things that make you happy. Happiness, ah ... who doesn't want to see *that* in action?

But then we started thinking: Instead of running an excerpt that takes you step-by-step through the grand Bliss plan, let's show it at work. We asked a handful of people who were eager for change to follow the plan, and then tracked them for a couple of months. We even asked life coach J.P. Hansen to personally guide our subjects through the Bliss List steps. Let's see what happened.

## Mr. and Ms. Creativity

Norah and Chris Guignon • Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

**N**orah and Chris seemed to have the perfect life. Highly educated (Norah has a master's degree in cultural heritage from the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England; Chris has a master's degree in architecture from MIT), well-traveled, and worldly, they had settled in Boston and married in June 2010. Norah, 31, and Chris, 30, landed what they believed were ideal jobs: she as the manager of an art gallery, and he as an architect at a prestigious architectural firm. They planned to buy a house and start a family. Then they hit a bump in the road: These goals were daunting on arts salaries in such an expensive city.

After much discussion, they decided to quit their jobs and start over in Pittsburgh, a more affordable city and also where they happened to meet and start dating at the University of Pittsburgh.

"Leaving our jobs, especially in this economy, was a big risk, because we're usually stable and reliable, and here we were choosing to forego a safety net," says Norah. "But we knew it would be worth it if we could find the lifestyle we've been looking for."

To get on the right track in a new city, the couple turned to Hansen's exercises, beginning with the Bliss List. Chris's list included the desire for a new job with more down time

WARDROBE STYLIST: JENNIFER GREENE FOR AGENT OLIVER; PROP STYLIST: SARA FOLDENAUER FOR KATE RYAN; GROOMING: KERRY-LOU AT PRO-STYLE-CREW FOR BOBBIBROWN

### NORAH'S BLISS LIST GOALS

- A job in an art gallery
- Blog popularity
- Self-confidence

### CHRIS'S BLISS LIST GOALS

- A job in architecture
- Work-life balance
- Time to be creative



## LIST WHAT YOU LOVE

- 1) Identify your passions.** Hansen calls them the six spokes of bliss—spiritual, relational, financial, emotional, physical, and intellectual goals. Write these goals across the top of a piece of paper and then compile your Top 15 Bliss List underneath them.
- 2) Narrow your list.** Concentrate on the top seven goals and you'll see better results than if you try to pay equal attention to all 15.
- 3) Keep it simple.** No shocking revelations? Don't sweat it. "There were no real zingers on my list. I didn't discover that I wanted to fly a plane or live in the forest," Norah says. "But I did realize money wasn't as important as I'd thought."
- 4) You can change it.** Don't be afraid to tweak your list as your goals evolve or are accomplished. "My first Bliss List was 90 percent career-oriented," Norah explains. "Then I read Chris's, which had a really healthy balance of life, family, and career goals, and I decided to redo mine!"
- 5) Assess your achievements.** Appreciate your successes as you go. "When I looked at my list, I realized that much of what I wanted, I already had. It's easy to focus on what you don't have, and this exercise made me feel accomplished," Norah says.
- 6) Ask questions.** For all future decisions, ask yourself: Are they supporting my Bliss List goals? "Communicating what I wanted out of life gave me confidence to decline offers that sounded good but weren't moving me toward where I wanted to go," says Norah. "Now, I carefully consider every decision instead of going on autopilot and making the same choices I had always made in the past."

for drawing. "I loved my job in Boston, but at 60 hours a week, it came at a large sacrifice to everything else, especially time for my own projects," he says.

To land a new dream gig, Chris started studying for the seven rigorous exams required to be a licensed architect—and tried to set aside some time for his creative endeavors as well. He was excited when Hansen recommended meditation to heighten his focus. "I'd seen scientific studies about the benefits of meditation and had been meaning to try it," he says. "I'm one of these chronically plugged-in people, and I know it can sometimes be to the detriment of my work and my sanity."

One of the steps that made it easier for Chris to put down his smartphone: deleting apps that could become a time suck. "J.P. encouraged me to unplug from political news and spend some of that time concentrating on my goals." Simple enough.

And as for the meditation? "A few times a week, I sit still and silent for 15 to 30 minutes," Chris says. The practice has helped him to focus: He's passed three out of seven exams to date and started a new comic book project. By Day 60, Chris was hired as the designer and project manager at

an environmental architecture firm.

At the top of Norah's Bliss List was finding a new job at an art exhibition space, investing more time in her art blog, Curate 1k, and increasing her self-confidence. "When we left Boston, I started to feel nervous about the path I was on. After creating my Bliss List [see sidebar at left], it became very clear that I want to continue working in the arts," she says.

Hansen advised Norah to set aside time to write her blog while she looked for a new job. Norah stoked her creativity with her Bliss Board (see next page), which features images from other blogs like Design Sponge and photos from the couple's honeymoon in Peru. "I

never had to clearly define what I want out of life so explicitly before.

I just tried to be as honest as possible," says Norah.

Now, curate 1k has 70,000 followers, and Norah has been hired as the marketing manager at a local nonprofit contemporary art gallery. For an extra boost

in her self-confidence, Hansen suggested that Norah write down everything she's thankful for. "It was satisfying to see such a long list of the great things in my life," she says. "I finally feel like I've made it and have the life I want. This summer we hope to start house-hunting."

“I never had to clearly define what I want out of life so explicitly before.”

Norah

# Mr. Positivity

Phil Vogel • Cincinnati, Ohio

Phil, 45, spent his career selling everything from Samuel Adams beer to photocopiers, but in February of 2012, he was laid off by his employer and spent nearly an entire year looking for a new job. The divorced dad has joint custody of his two kids, ages ten and 12, and wanted his next gig to be less time-consuming and more stable.

Phil's Bliss List showed that money was an important goal. To illustrate his Bliss Board, Phil pinned a photo of students at graduation (because he hopes to pay his children's college expenses) and another of Disneyland (for the family vacation he dreams of) to spark his motivation.

Next, Hansen instructed Phil on the importance of positive thinking. "Some of my fellow unemployed friends were like Eeyore from *Winnie-the-Pooh*, always saying, 'There's nothing out there.' I had to consciously cut out the negative talk," Phil admits. Hansen encouraged him to repeat affirmations every night before bed, such as *I will have a new high-earning position*.

It paid off. In just two months, Phil landed a job as a national account rep for sales at a

manufacturing company. The position promises a good salary and minimal travel. "Once I opened myself up, I was surprised how quickly my dreams became real," he says.

Phil has become such a Bliss Board believer that he created another one when his son, Vince, ten, struggled with reading. He's happy to say that just one school term later, his son has already improved his grade from a C to a B average.

## EASIEST THING EVER: THE BLISS BOARD

- 1) Pick a surface.** Buy a corkboard or poster board from a local office supply store.
- 2) Add inspiration.** Attach pictures and quotes that motivate you. Hansen has, "Desire, believe, and be grateful" on his and recommends adding the phrase "Or something better!" across the bottom of yours to keep dreams lofty.
- 3) Display.** Keep your board where you can see it.

◀ A sample Bliss Board



### PHIL'S BLISS GOALS

- Find steady work
- Earn more money
- Think positively



# Mr. Dad

Jeremy Cole • Omaha, Nebraska

Since 2002, Jeremy, 29, has served three tours of duty as a combat medic, one in Iraq and two in Afghanistan, where he met his wife, Ciara, who was also deployed. In 2009, he returned to the United States with the dream of finding a civilian job and spending more time with his children, now two years old and four years old.

To begin with, Jeremy was anxious to find out how his medic skills would translate from the battlefield to the office. “Most civilian jobs required me to have college credit, but I don’t have

that—my knowledge and expertise come through firsthand experience in war.” This is where Hansen stepped in, changing the military language on Jeremy’s résumé into more descriptive sentences about his skills that better convey his qualifications to civilian recruiters. “I started feeling more comfortable with what I have to offer, and less intimidated during interviews,” Jeremy says.

Jeremy was offered a high-paying security position in Afghanistan in 2013 and turned it down. He had learned that sometimes it’s worth it to wait. Sticking with his family-focused goals, Jeremy applied for local jobs, and found consulting work teaching tactical medicine to FBI and SWAT teams. Now, he’s applying for a job as a full-time police officer.

Jeremy posted original piano and saxophone compositions to YouTube after adding music to his Bliss Board. A local theater and the History Channel reached out to him. “Now that I’m working on my various passions at once, I feel like I’m firing on all cylinders,” he says. ■

## REVAMP YOUR RÉSUMÉ

### 1) Explain, don’t list.

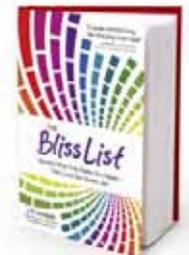
Write three full sentences about your current or previous job with three to five bullet points highlighting your achievements.

2) Limit activities. Add two hobbies to showcase your interests without seeming too preoccupied.

3) Cut the months. If you have brief gaps in your employment history, list only the years at each job, not the months.

4) Use active language. Opt for strong, positive verbs like *sold*, *earned*, and *developed*.

**BE YOUR BLISS**  
For your own career coach, pick up J.P. Hansen’s **The Bliss List** in bookstores, online, and at [rd.com/blisslist](http://rd.com/blisslist).



### JEREMY’S BLISS GOALS

- Translate Army skills to civilian work
- Family time
- Make and share his music