

Episode 23: Identifying Your Ideal Second Act: Nancy Collamer
and the 25 Questions
(09/24/2018)

Who	Audio Segment
Andy Levine	So I'm wondering if you can finish this sentence for me. The key to identifying and tran... Let me start again. The key to identifying and transitioning to a second act is... What comes to mind for you?
Nancy Collamer	Figure out what you love to do, do well, and find most meaningful, and then get out there and put yourself in opportunities way.
	INTRO MUSIC; FADE TO BACK DROP FOR PODCAST OVERVIEW
Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major life changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act. I'm your host, Andy Levine.</p> <p>On this episode, we're going to spend the next twenty minutes with Nancy Collamer. Nancy is the author of <i>Second Act Careers: 50 Ways to Profit From Your Passions During Semi-Retirement</i>.</p> <p>She is a recognized expert on career change and she writes a monthly career blog for the PBS site NextAvenue.org. In today's podcast we focus on a complimentary resource which is available on her website, www.mylifestylecareer.com.</p> <p>It's a downloadable workbook titled: <i>25 Questions to Help You Identify Your Ideal Second Act</i>.</p> <p>Here's my interview with Nancy Collamer.</p>
Andy	Nancy, thank you for joining the podcast today.
Nancy	So glad to be here.
Andy	So I wanna start a little bit with your own background and the work that you do. Can you give us the elevator speech on Nancy?
Nancy	Sure. Happy to. Well, my background was that I was a psychology major undergrad, which I fondly refer to as unemployment 101 and really didn't have a clue what I wanted to do.

Andy	What school did you go to?
Nancy	<p>I went to UNC Chapel Hill. And then after, believe it or not, my first job was working as a management trainee for AT&T back in the days when it was AT&T. And interestingly enough, I was there as the breakup was going on in the company. And one of the things that they did was they pulled in some career coaches to work with people to try to help them figure out new opportunities within the company. And after working with these folks for about two days, I thought to myself, "Jeez, you know, someday I would love to do what they do."</p> <p>So in any case, at that point, I got married, went to work in corporate human resources, but eventually made my way back to graduate school, got a master's in career development and started doing some private career coaching and writing about career issues. And really, my focus has always been helping people figure out ways that they can figure out how to work on a flexible or a part-time basis. And I did that for about 15 years. Had a concentration on working with moms. And then when I wrote the book, "Second-Act careers," really shifted my focus to the boomers. And that's what brings me here today.</p>
Andy	I have "Second-Act Careers" at home. How long ago did you write that?
Nancy	That came out in 2013. it's done well and continues to sell. So grateful for that.
Andy	Good, good. I would like to spend our time together, as I mentioned to you, to try to help people who are frustrated in work, but maybe also are scared of making a change. Do you see that quite a bit in people you interact with, that kind of thing?
Nancy	Career change is scary. And anytime people go through a transition, it is always a challenging time. There's a wonderful book on transitions by William Bridges. And in that book, he talks about the feeling that you have when you move from one stage of your life to another stage. And he says it feels like somebody who is swinging, you know, like an acrobat in a circus who swings from one platform to another, and that time before you land is that horrible pit in the feeling that you get in your stomach where you think, "My goodness, I'm never going to get there."
Andy	That's a fantastic analogy.
Nancy	Yeah.
Andy	So on your website, you have this really incredible resource called 25 Questions to help you identify your ideal second-act. I'd like to actually go through some of the questions, but before that, how did you come up with the idea of developing this?
Nancy	Yeah. Well, it's interesting because so many people think that when you go to a career coach, that they are going to provide you with the answers. And in fact, a really good coach is somebody who asks you the right

	<p>questions because when you're asked the right questions, that's an opportunity for you to figure out the answers. Most of us have the answers inside of ourselves. We're just not looking at the situation through the correct lens. And I think questions can help us to do that.</p>
Andy	<p>In your guide, you talk about actually physically writing down the answers to these as a valuable way. Why is that important, you think?</p>
Nancy	<p>It is so helpful when you take information and you get it outside of your head and you put it down on paper. And it does several things. First, it just helps you to organize your thoughts. It also, when you have it down on paper, it becomes much more real to you. I was thinking about this very thing this past week because my daughter is in the process of wedding gown shopping.</p>
Andy	<p>Congratulations.</p>
Nancy	<p>Thank you. And even though, obviously, we knew she was getting married, there is something about seeing her in that gown that, wow, it suddenly becomes so real. And the same thing happens when you have that crazy idea inside your head and you put it down on paper and then you walk away from it and then you come back to it a few days later and you look at it and you think, "Hmm, maybe I really can do something with that. So writing it down is critically important.</p>
Andy	<p>So within these 25 questions, you break them up into four areas. Values, skills, and experience, strengths, gifts and talents, and then hopes, dreams, and my favorite word, impossibilities, which I really like. I'd love to just, we're not gonna go through all 25 questions. It would become a very boring podcast. But I'd love to just give a sampling of these and maybe have you react in how you came up with this and why this is important, and that thing. So I'll start with the values. And one question you ask is what are the big issues or causes you find yourself consistently talking, reading, worrying, or thinking about? Tell me about what's the value behind that and how does that help people focus in?</p>
Nancy	<p>So a lot of people, when they think about an encore career doing something for the greater good, they think about in terms of, well, what organizations do I enjoy supporting? And you might have some of those that are important to you, but a lot of folks don't necessarily have that. But we all have issues that anchor us. You know, when you watch the evening news, what riles you up when you read a book, what pulls you in? And sometimes it's not so obvious. You know, I was speaking with someone the other day and she was talking about how passionate she is about the issue of families having dinner together. Well, that's not an official cause, but it's a topic that she feels passionately about. So I think it's important to expand the way that you look at the whole question of issues or causes. And it might open up some possibilities for you that you'll find really exciting and motivating.</p>

Andy	Another question from the value section you talk about is who inspires you? Which I thought was a really interesting question. Talk about that for a moment.
Nancy	Yeah. I think we all have people in our lives who inspire us and oftentimes for different reasons. You know, when I meet with clients, I often hear very personal stories where people will say things like, you know, "I had a grandmother who she never worked, but she was the one who always cook these amazing family dinners. And she would take the time to sit down and talk with me about my day." And when I say to them, "Well, what was so meaningful to you about that?" Then they'll sit and think about it and they'll say things like, "You know, I realized how important community was or how important family was or how important it was to really make an honest effort to listen to other people." So this question of who inspires you, I think we tend to think of celebrities or heroes.
Andy	Winston Churchill or something like that.
Nancy	Yeah, yeah. And. you know, those are great answers and, but I think the important thing with all of these questions, and I say this in the introduction, is answer the question, but then ask yourself why.
Andy	Yes, I did see that as sort of the critical connector to things. Two more areas. Strengths, gifts and talents. And you had an interesting question in there which is what do you do easily that others find difficult? So tell me about the thinking behind that question.
Nancy	<p>Yeah. This is a question that I really zeroed in on early on in my practice. The very first thing that I did after I got out of graduate school was I actually ran small group workshops that were called part-time careers for fulltime mothers and we get together groups of fulltime moms and we would talk about what they wanted to do on a part time basis.</p> <p>And I will never forget the time I had a woman in the group and people work through these questions as well as some other exercises. This woman had the most incredible sense of humor. But when it came time to identify her strengths, it was so natural to her that she didn't see it. And what was so powerful was everyone else in the room turned to her and said, you missed the most important thing. And the reality is our most natural gifts, the things that come most easily to us, we tend to overlook and we also tend to downplay them because we feel like, "Well, I didn't work that hard at that," and yet those are the very gifts that it's best to use those because those are the things that really are our natural gifts.</p>
Andy	Also in that section, you had a really short question, but I loved it, which was what energizes you? And is that hard for people to know or do generally people sort of instinctively know this is what I care about. This is what energizes me.

Nancy	I think most people instinctively know. What I add to that question is not only what energizes you, but who energizes you, and conversely, who drains you. And it's important to think of it in terms of environments too. Certain people find cities really energizing. Other people find the country is much more energizing for them. The important thing though about this question as it pertains to second-acts is that for a lot of people, money is no longer the motivator. And so you really need to have something that is going to motivate you and excite you and get you out of bed in the morning and it's going to energize you. If what you're doing doesn't energize you, the odds of you really being successful or happy doing it are very, very slim.
Andy	Final area, and this was the hopes, dreams and impossibilities. I love this question. What would you do if you won the lottery and you no longer needed to work?
Nancy	Yeah. That's a very popular question and I think it's important to think about it in terms of...think of it two years after you've won the lottery. You've sort of done the, you know...
Andy	You've traveled the world okay.
Nancy	<p>Exactly, exactly. You know, you've done the wild and crazy things. And now, like, you're settling back into life as it will now be. And when you take money out of the equation, it's amazing how possibilities open up for people. We live in a society that really values money and income. And so oftentimes, people think of career choice in terms of what's going to pay me the most. And that's a hard habit to break. And that's why I like that question, is it just frees people up to think of things that they might not have considered before.</p> <p>And the important thing to remember about that question is even if what you'd like to do, let's say you'd say, "Well, gee, if money was no issue, what I'd like to do is start a foundation." Well, maybe that's not possible for you right now. But again, why? What's important to you about starting that foundation? Is it helping people? Is it helping people in a certain area? Is it that you wanna make a difference in your town? Really drill down, think about why it's important to you because you might be able to figure out a bridge to get you to that someday dream of creating a foundation.</p>
Andy	And just to talk on the finances side of it for a moment. So for someone who maybe is in their 50s and maybe hasn't saved quite as much for retirement as they should have at that point, they're in a good, well-paying job, but they're unhappy in that job. Is that sort of feeling handcuffed for a lot of people?
Nancy	Yeah, I think it's reality for a lot of people these days.

Andy	And how do they break out of the handcuffs? Do they have to find something that is a more rewarding job that can allow them to make the same income? And is that pretty difficult to do usually?
Nancy	I think the important thing to do is to really think about the elements of your job and your life that really matter to you and that are most important to you. And try to figure out, again, a way to bridge, to take one step closer to that ultimate goal that you hope eventually to be able to pursue. Sometimes, it's making small changes to your situation can really have quite a big impact. So the important thing is think about what matters and identify the pieces that you have that you might be able to work with, and then you put yourself out there, talk with people, begin to do some research, and you might find some fairly novel ways to make a shift that really can help improve your life.
Andy	In some of your writings, you talk about semiretirement. You've also talked with me here today about encore careers. Can you contrast the two and the differences?
Nancy	Yeah. Well, encore careers really refers to second acts for the greater good. Whereas semiretirement or second-act careers includes encore careers, but it includes all sorts of other possibilities. So it's the gentleman who I interviewed a few months back, who, former vice president, now lives in Portland, Maine. He works part time as a food tour guide for four hours a day and then during the winter months, he works at the local basketball stadium as an usher. So he combines just two really fun jobs that get him out of the house doing things that he loves to do. He loves talking with people, and he enjoys being around food. He loves being around sports. So that is, you wouldn't call that an encore career because it's not doing anything to necessarily change the world, but it's something that's fun. So it's just second-act careers is a much broader umbrella.
Andy	When you talk about an encore career, does one person stick out in your head, someone you've interviewed or someone who, you know, just to you sort of exemplifies what that means?
Nancy	Oh, you know, there are so many people I've had the good fortune. One of the things I get to do is I write for nextavenue.org and I've been able to go to the Encore.org Conference over the past several years. And there, I've watched the purpose prize be awarded to all sorts of just amazing people. And so I can't say there's one person that stands out for me, although the winners of the purpose prize, which is now administered by AARP, there are just some incredible people who've done amazing things.
Andy	Okay. Okay. When you think about people who have successfully made the leap to a new career, are there common traits that they share that you think are sort of a predictor of success in terms of making that leap?

Nancy	I think they do two things. One is, as I mentioned before, they spend some time seriously thinking about what matters in their life. And the second is they put themselves in opportunities path. And by that, I mean, so much attention is paid to doing things like asking these questions and doing self-reflection. And I talk about the fact that there are three steps to this process that you do some self-reflection, you do some research, and then you get out there and you begin to explore and test drive. And it's in that third step, that's where you put yourself in opportunities path, and that's where the magic happens.
Andy	Is the test driving difficult for some people? It's a hard step?
Nancy	It's a hard step because it's so much easier to just sit inside your house and stare at the computer. But I can't tell you the number of people who I have interviewed over the years. When I ask them how did you end up doing the second act, what they tell me is it was a seemingly random event. It was a random conversation. It was the gentleman who I just referred to with the main foodie tours. How did he find out about that? He was at the barber shop and he was talking with the guy who was cutting his hair about the fact that he was new in town and he loved the food. He loved history. And the barbershop said to him, "You know, there's this new company in town and they're looking for tour guides." Well, on one hand you can look at that as sure luck. But I look at it a different way. And I say he had already done some thinking about what was important to him and what mattered. And then he was willing to put it out there in that conversation with the barber. And I hear those similar types of lucky stories happening with these types of people all the time.
Andy	So you kind of make your own luck, is what I'm hearing you say.
Nancy	Yeah. Yeah.
Andy	Are there ways also to advance that might be internships or taking courses or, you know, getting out in the field, that sort of thing?
Nancy	Yeah. Yeah. I'm, I'm a huge fan of taking courses. And of course, these days taking courses means not just going to a traditional university. There are courses on everything that you can imagine. I joke that in during the research for my book, I came across a three-day dog walking certification program. Volunteering is another great way or just taking on a psychic or a project for someone can also be a terrific way to just test things out, see if you like it, and determine if it's a good fit.
Andy	One of the things that I have found in and so far I've done, I mentioned to you about 21 profiles of different people. It seems to rarely be a straight line. You know, it normally is kind of people bouncing around through different things and then that eventually gets them to something that they really enjoy and something they find rewarding. Have you found that in the people you've interviewed as well?

Nancy	<p>It's never a straight line. I think that is such a misconception and I refer to it as a meandering path. And you are going to hit potholes along the way and you will hit detours. And oftentimes along the journey, you will take a turn that you never expected and that's where you find your next act. So what I always say to people is, again, you want to spend the time upfront really thinking about what you love to do, what you do well, and what matters to you. And then take some time to do some research. But at some point, you gotta take that brave step of putting aside the books and the computer and get out there and start to talk to people. Start taking some courses. Maybe take on that project because as you do, you will begin to learn things about yourself and you will hear about opportunities. And again, that's where serendipity occurs. So you want to get out of the house and really test-drive things because that's how you're going to move yourself forward.</p>
Andy	<p>So we've talked about the 25 questions to help you identify your ideal second act. If people wanna get this, where can they go, Nancy?</p>
Nancy	<p>So they should come to my website, which is mylifestylecareer.com and they can sign up for it. They get to download it, save it to their computer, and along with that, they will get a subscription to my newsletter. Everything is totally free. That comes out twice a month and the nice thing about the newsletter is it's a way to just get a constant stream of new ideas for your second act.</p>
Andy	<p>So you mentioned your book "Second-Act Careers." I've focused most of our time on the free resource, Twenty-Five Questions. But tell me about your "Second-Act Careers," how you came up with the idea for the book and what the experience was like writing it.</p>
Nancy	<p>Yeah. So writing the book is sort of an interesting story. I came up with the idea for the book because it was... Back then, it was 2010. So it was shortly after the financial collapse. And I was having conversations with lots of friends who were in their 50s who were taking a look at their 401(k)s and saying, "Wow. I thought I had saved enough, but I think I may have to work a lot longer than I expected, but I really don't wanna have to continue to work in a fulltime position. What else is out there?"</p> <p>And as I mentioned before, I had really spent the bulk of my practice focused on moms who wanted to work on a flexible basis. So at some point, the light bulb went on and I thought, "Hmm, you know, I bet these same strategies and resources would be of tremendous value to the people over 50." And that was when I came up with the idea for the book. In any case, the book, I pitched it to an agent. It got sold and then, believe it or not, I had 16 weeks in which to write the book.</p>
Andy	<p>I may take you back. We may be covering some things we've already talked about, but sometimes I find it helpful just to crystallize things down to a short sentence or phrase or that sort of thing. So I'm wondering if you can finish this sentence for me. The key to identifying and transitioning to a second act is... What comes to mind for you?</p>

Nancy	Figure out what you love to do, do well, and find most meaningful, and then get out there and put yourself in opportunities way.
Andy	I think that's a great way to end. Thank you very much for coming in, Nancy. Really appreciate your time and look forward to getting this out on the podcast and hope more people benefit from the 25 questions that I found so helpful.
Nancy	Thanks so much.
	OUTGOING MUSIC; FADE TO BACK DROP FOR PODCAST CONCLUSION
Andy	<p>So that is a wrap on Episode 23 of "Second Act Stories." Our special thanks to Nancy Collamer for taking the time to meet with me.</p> <p>And if you are looking to download her "25 Questions To Help You Identify Your Ideal Second Act," simply visit her website at www.MyLifeStyleCareer.com. Click on the button at the very top of the page and is labeled "Sign Up for Our Free Newsletter (and Free Gift)." And I'd also encourage you to purchase her "Second Act Careers" book.</p> <p>Next week, we'll go back to our customary profile of individuals pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act.</p> <p>Chris Donovan, a telephone repairman turned woman's shoe designer, is our next profile. Yes, they don't get any more quirky than this. It's probably the most unusual career change I've come across yet.</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. There are more second act stories just around the corner.</p>