

## Profile: Andrea Marquis

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My first “real job” was in customer service for Paychex payroll services in 1995. I had been temping, trying to figure out what I might like to do and I felt like I should get a job with a steady paycheck and health insurance, after working in restaurants throughout college and beyond. I had a wide range of interests, but nothing in my prior training or education had seemed like it was pointing me in any certain direction for a career. Over the next few years, my husband and I changed jobs a couple times and then found ourselves in Pittsburgh. The lure of good money and a challenge I did not know if I could tackle made sales attractive to me. Paychex seemed like a good option, since I knew the company and the products. In early 2000, resume in hand, I cold-called the sales manager at the Pittsburgh Paychex office, and basically walked the thin line between persistence and stalking until he hired me.

I liked selling payroll services to small businesses, and I was successful. After a few years, I became a leader in our office, and I qualified for the annual sales conference in multiple years. In 2005, I started selling in a different territory. It was like starting over, and made the job feel like an adventure again. There was a difference in me in that I found myself looking for additional training. I had learned all I could from Paychex, and the job had started to feel like running on a hamster wheel. My husband would tell me that I was working too hard. I started to literally experience tunnel vision and the stress and quota pressure was getting to me. As the company hired younger and younger sales reps to do the same job I was doing, I felt increasingly out of place. I started to speak out against the aspects of a corporate environment that made less sense to me as I learned more about myself and the way that sales worked for me. I had grown and the business I was in was changing, and I fit in less and less. I was still successful, but the sameness of my day to day activities was wearing on me and I did not find meaning in it as I once did. Also, the sense of challenge was gone. I had “been there and done that” and I was getting bored. But I had a sense of stability and a level of comfort in my role in a large corporation--and I made good money.

In 2007, months before my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, I started getting the sense that I was on the verge of a new phase in my life. I did not know what it was about, but it was very exciting, and it compelled me to look outside of myself, to start to seek help and answers. Over the next couple of years, I hired different coaches; I enrolled in long-term workshops and extra sales training. I devoured sales books and motivational tapes. All of this helped me to *get* better at my Paychex sales job, but it did not help me to *feel* better about it. I started to get a pain in the back of my skull that exhausted me. I got acupuncture, I went to speak with a social worker, I got deep tissue massages. I was invited by a friend to join a Mastermind group. I was told that several of the people in the group had made major career or life changes, and that I shouldn't be surprised if something similar happened for me.

One day in March 2009, I woke up and could not deny that I was burned out. It wasn't the kind of sales slump that you could work through. I knew on a very deep level that my time at Paychex was limited. I saw the calendar stretching before me and I knew that I would not be able to keep up the same old day to day activities in the same way, with the same people, for much longer. Every day I woke up and the feeling grew more pronounced. The problem? I had NO IDEA what I wanted to do. And I was scared. The perceived security of my job seemed like too much to walk away from. I told my Mastermind group about this and asked how I could even begin to think about figuring out my next career move. They all

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said, “Call Neal!” which was good enough for me. So I called him and set up a lunch meeting for a free consultation.

I liked Neal, I liked his low-key insightful approach, and I felt that he could help me. We started our sessions, and at first I did not know why he had me do some of the initial exercises. They seemed a little silly or dumb. With one of the exercises I reached conclusions that I liked to look at pretty colors, see unexpected new things, and wear comfortable clothes. How was that going to be any help changing careers? I decided not to worry about the how, and trust that my friends were right that Neal could help me. With his help I started to learn what I liked, what I was good at, and what I wanted to experience every day. He acknowledged the fear and helped me to accept it and then work through it. When I let it leak that I was seeking another position, I had some other B2B sales offers, but they seemed like more of the same. I did not want something so similar to what I had been doing for almost 10 years. I was tired of wearing suits, I wanted a change of scenery, and I wanted to be more creative. I wanted to feel more like myself, not the stressed-out, wound-too-tight person I had become.

I had been a knitter since I met my husband, and before I knew I was no longer happy at my job I had already started to get more involved in fiber arts, and had designed a few hand-knitted pieces. I wondered if that could be a career. It sure seemed like fun, but I could not see how anyone made money doing it. It seemed like they all had to have “day jobs” and still struggled. One day, when I was feeling particularly sorry for myself, I met with Neal, and whined to him something like “what am I going to do?” Since his wife is a knitter, he asked, “don’t those yarn shops need someone to sell them the yarn?” That ingenious idea had not occurred to me, but it was THE ANSWER! I could take my sales skills and my passion for creating and knitting, and join them! I was instantly energized and started working my network to get positioned to break into the industry.

I had a client who owned a yarn shop and she got two of her best yarn manufacturer’s reps to talk to me about what they did, and she also got me into the industry trade show, which was happening in a month. One of my coaches helped me format a new resume. I quite methodically researched companies who would be at the trade show, and came up with criteria to evaluate which companies would be the best fit. I did not know how hard or easy it would be to get a yarn company to give me a chance. Turns out, it was easy to get “in” with really small companies and companies who are not so great to work with. There was no one to tell me the best way to do things, so I have learned a lot through trial and error, although I have built a new network and have received great support from colleagues, creative partners, and customers.

Now knitting and designing are part of my job. All of the fun tools and supplies that I would have been buying for myself anyway, are business expenses. I have not made much money yet, but I have at least covered my expenses since Day 1. I don’t spend as much, and because I am traveling a lot, I realize I can get by with less stuff. I am working on simplifying my life and de-cluttering. I am completely independent and can work when I want, how much I want, and with whom I want.

It took about 6 months to realize that all of the preferences I uncovered, in those initial “silly” exercises Neal had me do were in my life on a daily basis. I am mobile, with ever changing scenery, and an expanding cast of characters. I am surrounded by beauty and creativity, and by beautiful and creative

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people. I am the Sales Department for many artists. I have always been at least break-even in my business, and after about 14 months, got “picked up” by a somewhat larger yarn company, through recommendations from many of my good customers. This will make the financial piece work. It was worth the few months of struggle while I made a name for myself and met the people who I will work with for years to come. It has taken time to gain a good reputation and to earn the trust of the shop owners, since there are bad sales reps even in a fun industry. People in the yarn world like my unique approach and my energy, and I am more organized than many of my counterparts because of the structure I learned working for a large corporation. I am innovative because I look for the variety and possibility in everything that I do, and because no one is restricting me in any way.

I find a lot of meaning in what I do. I have time with new people, which is exciting, and I have plenty of alone time to recharge and reflect. I learn about myself, what makes me tick, and what makes me happy. I see some neat and amazing things in my travels. I hear helpful tips from knitting geniuses, and I teach people new techniques, empowering them to believe in themselves enough to step out of their comfort zone, much like Neal does for me. Of course there are ups and downs. The things that I was good at in my old environment followed me to this one, and my weakest parts did as well. My typical day could include a 5 hour drive to do a workshop at one of my customers’ shops with 10 beginning knitters, sending emails, calling to get appointments, doing research to find a good pattern to showcase one of my yarns, knitting samples, writing my monthly newsletter, following up with customers, working a booth at a fiber festival, keeping track of my sales and my finances, or maybe just puttering around in my pajamas, taking it slow on a certain day. I am traveling quite a bit, but when I am home, I can take a walk with my dog and husband in the middle of the day, or meet a friend for lunch, or take a nap if I want to! I can completely be myself. I am friends with my vendors and with my customers. I still do work hard, but it is a pace that makes sense for me. I don’t have to do something if I don’t think it is a good idea. I don’t have to worry that my hair is going grey, since many of my customers are women in their 50s and 60s, and they accept me exactly as I am. And I don’t have to wear suits—I usually wear my handknits.