

Ease the pressure today!

Need to make some changes now? Rosie shares her tips for micro-downshifting

- 1 Give yourself a firm work/life boundary.** And stick to it! The moment you start your commute home or start cooking dinner, that's the moment you should stop thinking about work.
- 2 Don't go it alone.** If you're feeling overwhelmed at work, it's OK to ask for help. Pick a time when your boss isn't super-stressed and ask if you can have a chat. Let them know you're struggling and need more support.
- 3 Protect your downtime.** Move away from your desk at lunchtime, even if it's to read a book in a corner of the office, and program your phone to block email alerts out of hours.
- 4 Realise presenteeism is pointless.** In fact, it can actually make you less productive. Leave the office on time as often as possible – guilt-free.
- 5 Just say no.** Identify the tasks that can be safely ignored or declined, and forget about them. No-one can do everything asked of them.

awareness of mental health and life satisfaction," says Rebecca Fraser, a member of the executive committee for the CDAA.

"If you're in a corporate role but driven by helping people, your job isn't going to make you happy. But it's only as you get older – when you're more mature, with greater self awareness – that you get enough experience to see that."

CHANGING PACE

Alejandra Zapata, 35, began to consider downshifting after she had her first child. "I was working in the manufacturing industry

as a productivity analyst when I got pregnant," she says. "And as well as flexibility for my children, I realised I needed to do something that was more balanced, meaningful and fulfilling."

After having her second child, Zapata, who lives in Melbourne, swapped her corporate job for a career as a productivity and success coach. "It wasn't easy to take the leap, as I was in a good role with a six-figure salary," she explains.

"As well as my self-doubt, I had to cope with other people's opinions – my husband supported me, but not many people understood. I got through by focusing on what I was doing and why,

and accepting that not everyone had to agree with my choice."

Fraser advises taking pragmatic steps before embarking on a career shift, to protect yourself from any fallout. "If your job isn't fulfilling and you're not motivated, it's a mental-health risk, so changing pace can be a good idea – as long as it doesn't introduce any additional stresses," she says.

"I always recommend having a three-year financial buffer in place, whether that's to cover your full income or just bills."

You might think saving for a holiday to help you unwind is worthwhile, but saving enough to put the brakes on your career could prove an even better choice.

A NEW LIFE

While I had managed to save a buffer before going freelance, I hadn't considered the cost to my self-esteem. I was used to the kudos of being deferred to for big decisions, managing a budget and leading a team – as well as perks such as exotic holidays and more free cocktails than I care to remember. Suddenly, I was at a desk in my pyjamas, managing a team of one.

"Leaving the role of 'expert' is really challenging," Alchin says. "Half of elite sportspeople suffer with mental-health issues when they stop, which can happen when your professional identity is closely connected with your personal one. I have to help people changing careers to see the qualities they'll take away with them, such as grit and resilience, and which can help build their personal identities, too."

When I finally took the plunge, the organisation and self-discipline I'd learned at work boosted my new career. A year later, I've never been happier. Granted, I no longer enjoy the glamour and camaraderie of my old office or the stability of a regular income, but they're small prices to pay for being my own boss.

Zapata feels the same way: "I love what I do now. I had to go through a lot to get here, but I can see how much I've grown because of those challenges. It turns out the things I worried about losing from my old job weren't important after all."