



Nancy Svendsen

Time to
make
a movie

“It was one of those nights when I was sitting with colleagues and we were in Nashville, having drinks, and we got to talking about, you know, what would you do if you could really reinvent your life today, and it was something that just sort of came out of me and I said, ‘Well, I would make this documentary movie.’”

It had been in the back of Nancy Svendsen’s mind for a long time, so she admits she’s not quite sure what finally made her decide to be a filmmaker. But she was 46 years old, had enjoyed a great career, had two small children and didn’t want to travel all the time anymore. She wanted to do something in what she calls the next period of her life. Something that was meaningful.

“I spent 25 years as a health care executive,” Svendsen says. “But I am an artist, I have this artistic streak, I had this idea for a long time and I decided to go ahead and take the plunge.”

That meant, in part, taking the skills and organizational gifts she honed in corporate America and applying them to the complicated task of making a film. “I knew how to run big projects, and obviously I didn’t know much about filmmaking,” she says, “but it seems like one of those journeys where doors have just opened.”

Svendsen’s documentary-in-progress, *The Glass Ceiling*, tells the story of Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, the first Nepali woman to summit Mount Everest. “The story just really resonated with me, as someone who set a goal for herself and (had) a dream that seemed impossible. She was a woman in a male-dominated society; I really kind of fell in love with her and her story.”

Soon Svendsen will be off to Nepal, far from the business-travel hotels of Nashville, to interview those who knew Pasang and gather more footage. She’s also applying for grants and holding events to raise money and recently completed the film’s trailer. “It’s a long process, but I have a good start.”

The mother of five-year-old twins says embarking on this filmmaking project has been a mountain-climb in itself, but it’s rewarding. People have been generous in sharing their knowledge and their contacts. “Every day I wake up and I think, you know, I don’t have to get on a plane, I can (stay here and) spend time with my kids, but I can also work on this story, this project that’s really motivational to me, and it’s really energizing.”

She acknowledges that when you get to a certain point in your career, a degree of ego rears its head, making you embarrassed to ask what seem like stupid questions. But “a friend of mine said I needed to ask questions, and it really struck me: that’s going to be the key to my success. Put any ego aside and ask questions.”

For others looking to make a career change, Svendsen’s advice is to search for those transferable skills and things you have learned over the course of your career and the expertise you have gained. Then look at how those might be applied to the new venture you’re choosing.

“We don’t know what we don’t know yet. You don’t know what problems are going to present themselves down the line, because it is all new territory.”

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