

Change of career has made a real difference

Leaving behind a high-powered financially secure management job to retrain in holistic therapy is a risky gamble, but one that one Dereham woman hit the jackpot with, as **ROBYN GREENACRE** found out.

UNWINDING, relaxing and indulging in a little "me time" after a hard day, week, or even month, at work is common practice for career women who reward their long hours and devotion to the job by slipping off their sling backs and settling deep into the beautician's couch ready to be pampered into oblivion.

And while many may for a few minutes ponder what it would be like to swap places with their therapist or even recount resplendent dreams of leaving the rat race for the crawler lane, few follow through.

But one person gave up deadlines, agendas, office politics, and a reliance on caffeine to retrain in a vocation she had previously spent most of her money on.

Zoe Tuijl was the main breadwinner in her house, holding down a high-powered management job at the Learning Skills Council while running the family home.

The 42-year-old mother-of-three has worked hard in business from an early age, going back to work when her first two children were around six months old, and admits she is a perfectionist who strives for the best performance in herself, and as a result spent a lot of time in the office.

She said: "People say I was ambitious but it wasn't that. I was just a perfectionist, who couldn't rest unless I felt I'd done the best of my abilities.

"I was always rushing around, sitting in meetings panicking about how long it would take me to get back and pick the children up.

"I didn't know any different. I had friends who would only work part-time or not at all. I was always amazed

at how they didn't mind not earning or having the independence of a career."

Then last year it was announced there would be redundancies within Zoe's department so all staff would be given a grant of £250 to retrain or obtain a qualification.

And as she had been told her job was not at threat she decided to use the money for a course in something she thought sounded fun.

She said: "I had a well-paid job and would always have treatments during my lunchtime or after work. My nails, massages, Indian head, all sorts. It was my way of treating myself.

"I saw the advert for classes in Indian head massage and signed up. I found it fascinating and actually had a really good time. It's amazing how many ailments it can help - depression, stress, sinus trouble, eye strain. I qualified last year.

"Then I had my son, Thomas, and was on maternity leave, taking him to baby massage classes, and saw the amazing response he had to it. That's when we were given a second grant from the company so I decided to train in baby massage.

"Shortly after, redundancy became an option for me and I just decided to take it and see what happened.

"I wasn't scared, because I knew worse case scenario I could go out and get another job. When you've got a family to feed you'll do anything."

Her partner Mark agreed to take on the role of main breadwinner while Zoe focused on doing what she loved.

And already she has completed her baby massage course, is running courses in partnership with health visitors and at the Dereham leisure centre, and will graduate in reflexology in November.

"The difference in my life has been amazing which I wasn't really expecting. There's a lot less pressure on me and the family. There was no problem over Mark becoming the earner, we're very lucky that way.

"The strangest thing was when I had to cut my nails. It was so incredibly liberating.

"I'm not rushing through the door, focusing on dinner, then sorting out the children's homework. When Mark comes back from work dinner is ready, we all sit down and talk.

"The children have now taken up extra-curricular activities because



HAPPY DAYS: Zoe Tuijl is relishing her new career. Pictures: SONYA BROW

they know we can come and pick them up. They're much happier in general.

"Everything just slotted into place. I think it's because it was the right time for me to do it.

"Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I'd given it all up sooner. But then I realise it wouldn't have been the right time for me. I needed to know that I could happily never return to my old job again.

"And that's the truth. I began to get disillusioned about working and worried that I wasn't making

enough of a difference. I hated feeling I couldn't make an impact anymore.

"Now when I help someone's injury or a mother comes and tells me how much she's bonded with her baby through the massage I feel I'm making a difference. I'm happy as my family's happy, what could be better?"

● For more information about Zoe or to book an appointment with her call Top to Toe Massage on 013 851819.

DOING WHAT SHE LOVES: Zoe Tuijl.

