



Job shock sparked a switch

LIFE'S ALL WIRED UP NICELY – NOW I'M AN ELECTRICIAN

by **LIZ THOMAS**
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WHEN Nigel Crossman lost his job of 18 years, he refused to see himself as being on the scrapheap – and retrained as an electrician.

Two years on, he runs his own business, Blue Lightning Electrical Ltd and does everything from £20 odd-jobs to re-wires for £6,000.

"I can't believe I ever did anything else for a living now," says 47-year-old Nigel, from Normandy in Surrey. "I love working for myself. And I've been so busy that I've had to hire my first sub-contractor. It's a sign of how well things are going."

He had worked in retail since leaving school, but his change of career was sparked in May 2006, when Robert Dyas made him redundant.

"It was completely out of the blue," he says. "I was stunned and also cross. I felt as if little respect was given to how many years I had been there. Then I thought, 'Sod

you' – I'm going to make something of this!"

But after sending his CV to dozens of companies, he realised how inflexible his particular skills were.

"My old job involved many different areas – from IT to internal audit, staff training and opening new stores. But the things I could do were specific to Robert Dyas."

So, two months on, he decided to learn new skills.

BILLS

"I'd always had a vague notion of running my own business but all I knew was retail. I realised this might be a 'Now or Never' moment. I had the redundancy payment to pay the bills, my children had left home – I only had the house to run and, luckily, I have a very supportive wife."

Nigel had always enjoyed DIY, having built an extension and a loft conversion at his home. After searching for a course that would suit him he discovered New Career Skills.

He says: "For full certification, which costs £6,000, I had to do four modules – distance learning and practical courses. It was expensive

but what better way to spend your redundancy money, than to invest it in yourself?"

"At first I wondered what I'd let myself in for, but after the first practical session it all became clear."

Nigel also worked in a local car-hire firm and bought a van which came with a mobile car valeting business.

He says: "I'd need the van once I was qualified and the car valet side of things kept some cash coming in."

Then one year ago, with the help of his tutors, he set up Blue Lightning Electrical Ltd.

"With an ad in the Yellow Pages and some fliers I delivered locally, I was soon up and running," he says.

"My first job was a lady who lives nearby who needed wall lights fitting. Once she trusted me that became a re-wiring job. Word of mouth took care of the rest."

"Being made redundant really was the best thing that ever happened to me."

"I'd tell anyone to find the positive in redundancy – use it to move forward and learn something new. I have never regretted it – not once."

WHAT DOES REDUNDANCY ACTUALLY MEAN?

REDUNDANCY is a form of dismissal. Reasons include: the job you do no longer exists; cost-cutting means staff numbers must be reduced; the firm is shutting or moving.

Redundancy pay varies from half a week for every year if you're under 22 to a week

and half if you're over 41. The current maximum on a week's pay is £330 – your employer may have its own terms but it must match the statutory level.

The first £30,000 is tax-free and you should get notice of up to 12 weeks depending on length of service.

CONTACTS

- Blue Lightning Electrical: www.blue-lightning-electrical.co.uk
- New Career Skills (NCS) www.newcareer-skills.co.uk
- The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) offers free, confidential and impartial advice on all employment rights issues. Helpline 08457 47 47 47 or visit www.acas.org.uk
- Citizens Advice Bureau: www.adviceguide.org.uk