

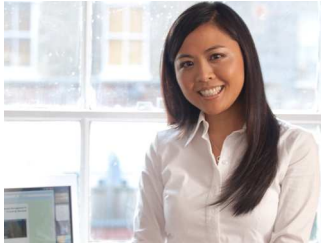
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## Long-distance call

Former banker Christine Yuen says that being made redundant turned out to be a blessing in disguise

Nadine Bateman

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Hong Kong-born Christine Yuen was a banker working for HSBC in London when she was made redundant last year. She'd been with the company since she was 17 years old and losing her job had a devastating effect.

"Redundancy is a very big pill to swallow," says Yuen. "It was the first time I'd experienced it and even though, at 29, I was younger [than many people who were also laid off] it didn't stop me feeling many emotions: shock, denial, anger and sadness. I felt I had hit rock bottom."

Having been used to working 12- to 14-hour days, Yuen found it hard to fill her time productively. However, after a while, she rediscovered her drive, thanks in part to her loving family, supportive fiancé and good friends, but also to a brilliant idea borne out of working in the competitive world of corporate finance.

"I set up a company called Zentime Living [zentime.co.uk]. It's a lifestyle business that targets clients such as City lawyers or corporate and investment bankers. I know first-hand how it feels not to have enough time and to constantly be struggling to balance work and personal responsibilities. So, I decided to set up a business helping people put some 'zen' time back into their hectic lives," says

Yuen.

"My company's services include booking accommodation and corporate meeting venues, arranging functions, diary management and business administrative support such as preparing marketing materials. We also take the stress out of relocating to London by getting clients sorted with banking, gas and utility accounts, television and telephone line installations and finding a local GP."

Before she moved to London four years ago, Yuen lived in Canada, where her parents moved to from Hong Kong when she was eight years old.

"I remember attending Christ Church Kindergarten in Kowloon Tong, then the Diocesan Girls' School until my parents moved to Vancouver with the hope of a better life for my brother and me. I learned the value of a dollar early on as both my parents left good jobs in Hong Kong and had to struggle for work in the Canadian job market with English as their second language. My mum had been a teacher and my dad an engineer at the University of Hong Kong. In Canada, mum had to work in Chinatown as a cashier and dad found a job in a small electronics repair shop and they both earned substantially less than in their former careers. But I grew up embracing Canadian culture because it is a very multicultural place."

Yuen worked part-time while at secondary school and university in Toronto, first in retail then as a teller at an HSBC branch. After gaining a master's degree in finance, she applied for a commercial manager's position at the bank, where she met the man who was to become her fiancé. The couple moved to London in 2006 to "gain some international work experience".

"It was an adventure but a little stressful as everything was so different and much more expensive," says Yuen. "Many things worked differently compared to what we were used to in Canada - from the way one would go about finding a flat to rent, taking public transport, looking for a job, to the day-to-day banking system."

It was those relocation experiences that sewed the seeds of Zentime Living. "As much as it was difficult losing my job, I have to say I am truly happy with what has transpired from the experience. It really forces you to think and search within yourself and to ask what it is that you are passionate about."