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# Young Indians get off the beaten track to explore offbeat professions

ADITI PAI AND SONALI ACHARJEE | June 22, 2012 | 22:36



Rajesh Bhatt

## DELHI

### Rajesh Bhatt 38

#### RUNS A DOG-WALKING SERVICE

A trained dog behaviourist, he moved beyond his field of training to walk dogs for a fee.

With busy pet parents, the demand is growing fast.

*"I am passionate about dogs and wanted to work with them."*

At the age of 83, Anjuna Sharma, an ardent dog lover, still manages to keep her faithful Labrador by her side-with a little help. Hers is one of the 10 households in F-Block, Saket, Delhi, which have discovered the benefits of hiring a professional dog walker-Alpha-11, one of the largest providers of professional dog-walking services in Delhi. Started in 2008 by Rajesh Bhatt, 38, who has worked in the field of dog training and behaviour correction for 18 years, the firm has 10 dog walkers in eight neighbourhoods across the National Capital Region. Alpha-11 charges Rs 4,000 per dog per month to walk and groom dogs twice a day for 30 minutes each. "I am passionate about dogs and wanted to work with them. When I first began in this field, it was unheard of in India. Picking up an offbeat profession was a risk but I was willing to take it," says Bhatt.

Like him, several young Indians are giving conventional careers a miss and pursuing their passion to explore offbeat professions. If animal lovers are making money while walking dogs for busy pet parents, the creatively inclined file away memories for customers in scrapbooks. Even as heritage buffs take wide-eyed tourists on walks and trails, engineers are giving up lucrative jobs to plant organic farms-only for the love of their hobbies.

When Mumbai girl Parul Shukla, 30, quit her well-paying hr job with DSP Merrill Lynch, the postgraduate in hr management from the London School of Economics didn't expect her day-long shopping sprees to turn lucrative. But after dressing up relatives and friends with much success, she turned her passion into a profession in 2011. From a 39-year-old divorcee who "needed some cheering up" to an overweight man who wanted a new look after losing 15 kg, she's dressed up dozens in the past year. "I can use my creativity, love for styling



Vaibhav Dugar

and my corporate experience in a new career that I enjoy every moment of," says the banker-turned-personal shopper. Around 60 per cent of Shukla's clients are men who are glad to get professional help to shop; she's even managed to convince a 39-year-old to buy red sneakers. The fashionista charges by the hour and gets around 15 clients a month. "People are travelling more for work or pleasure and want to be well turned out," she says.

Vaibhav Dugar, 27, walked on a new path, literally, when he went out for a jog at Mumbai's Bhavan College grounds in 2010. The telecommunications engineer quit his job as online marketing executive for a TV channel and moved to Pune to develop organic garden patches and vegetable farms in people's homes. "I studied in Darjeeling where there was green all around. I couldn't bear the ever-increasing pollution here; so I decided to spend my life doing what I think is good for the environment," says Dugar. He learnt the basics of organic plantation through books and the Internet and took up his first project—a 300 sq ft kitchen garden with spinach, tomatoes and carrots. In the past one year, he's set up around 17 such gardens, charging a minimum of Rs 50,000 per project. Dugar now makes more money than when he worked as a marketing executive. "It's a long way to a chemical-free world but I am taking my small steps," he says.

## PUNE

### Vaibhav Dugar 27 ORGANIC FARMER

The telecommunications engineer traded his CDs and gadgets for a sickle and spade in the hope of "turning the world chemical-free".

*"I decided to spend my life doing what I think is good for the environment."*



Parul Shukla

## MUMBAI

### Parul Shukla 30

#### PERSONAL SHOPPER

She was a banker for six years before she decided to help people shop for the right look. Her client list has steadily grown over the last 18 months.

*"People are travelling more and want to be well turned out."*

Exploring an idea that is still in its infancy is a surefire way to success, says Kunal Vahalia, 33, who started Namaste City Tours in Mumbai in 2006. With partner Naini Mehta, 45, he takes tourists on a drive or walk through the city's bylanes. Besides the regular heritage-spotting, he also takes explorers on a masala trail, shopping at the cotton wholesale markets and even on the local trains to feel the "real" Mumbai. "There's a growing demand for offbeat experiences, so we decided to make the most of that," says Vahalia, a software engineer who studied the travel industry before taking the plunge. He joined hands with Mehta, who had over a decade of experience in the travel industry, travelled across Mumbai extensively and then started the company with a capital of Rs 50,000. A majority of his clients are business travellers. "Most of our clients, who are foreigners, want to see Mumbai in a day," he says. So, he checks their interests and customises the trip, which costs around Rs 3,000 a day. With over 150 tourists coming to him every month, Vahalia is glad that he ventured into a field that was a far cry from what he studied for.

Not all need an education in their field of work. Anupama Choudary, 39, trained in interior design, studied management and worked in her father's ship maintenance company in Chennai for over 10 years. But what the Hyderabad-based mom-of-two now does is a far cry from her earlier profession. She makes scrapbooks, for a fee. The idea struck when she displayed some framed memorabilia at an art gallery in