

# Plot your escape

ROBERT WRINGHAM offers a ten-step escape plan.

**W**HEN employed, it can be difficult to find the time and energy to seriously plot your escape. That's why most people don't escape or even recognise that it's a real option. You're too preoccupied with doing your job, with commuting to and from it and with recovering from the associated exertions. You also have to contend with your own fears and internal resistance. Thankfully, *New Escapologist* is at hand.

Your job is probably one of the main miseries from which you would like to flee. Fortunately, being paid to sit in front of a computer is a very healthy circumstance from which to start plotting your escape. My escape began in precisely this environment and it is from here that you might also begin:

**1. MAKE SURE YOUR WORK PAYS AT LEAST £355 PER WEEK** This is the average weekly income for a UK citizen and to settle for less is to squander yourself. If you must sell a portion of your youth

for money, make sure it is at the going rate. If your weekly income is significantly less than £355, your first task is to get promoted, to secure a pay rise or to get a better job elsewhere.

**2. SAVE MONEY** You will need moderately healthy financial reserves in order to fund the first weeks or months of your escape. Aim to save a useful sum of money—I recommend no less than £5000. Let us call this sum your *escape fund*. This will be harder to achieve if you're in debt or subscribe to unnecessary services. There's more on saving money later in this section.

In order to get to your £5000 target more quickly, sell off unnecessary assets. In business this is called liquidation. Escapologists might want to consider also being minimalists. Convert unwieldy 'stuff' into mobile, liquid cash. You may only want to do this for high-value goods: selling individual DVDs is seldom lucrative. Take a look at Tim Eyre's primer on simple living on page ??.

**3. USE YOUR JOB AS A CAREER GYM** Like the

convict who uses the prison gym to get in shape, get as much experience as you can and of as many flavours as possible: do favours for people, run meetings, attend training courses, generate ideas, talk to the boss, talk to the cleaners, manage a budget, write reports, deliver presentations, make the tea. Record all of this on your cv. As anyone with an office job knows, most of your time at work is spent skiving or doing useless shit. There's even a word for it: presenteeism. Use some of this time to maximise your skill set. This will provide a safety net: you need to make yourself re-employable in case your escape plan fails.

4. CULL YOUR EXPENSES It's probably obvious that your income must exceed your outgoings. Bills can be avoided if you gradually eliminate your dependencies on the services for which you pay. Get rid of your car and become a pedestrian. Get rid of your mobile phone by telling people to use your house phone or email instead. Get rid of home Internet if you have it at work. Get rid of any other false liberty that only results in bills. You will soon find an optimum outgoing: the true cost of living. It will be much less than it was before your elimination process and will

usually be the sum of your rent, food, house phone, council or municipal tax and electricity. Let us call this sum *Cost of Living*, for it will come into play again later.

5. QUIT YOUR JOB This is the end of your career.

6. GIVE YOUR KEYS BACK TO THE LANDLORD Put your stuff into storage (I can vouch for a company called SafeStore, but there are lots of others).

Cancel all Direct Debits, except for the one paying for your storage. Up until now, everything has been prologue. This is the real beginning of your escape.

7. TAKE YOUR ESCAPE FUND AND FLY TO

SOMEWHERE VIBRANT AND CHEAP The official best cities in which to find this combination are Zurich, Vienna, Vancouver, Geneva, Auckland, Frankfurt, Sydney, Munich and Dusseldorf.

I can also personally vouch for Berlin and Montreal. Rent a cheap apartment there. As a rule of thumb, immigrant-heavy areas (such as Kreuzberg in Berlin and Saint-Henri in Montreal) are alive and inexpensive, have good food, public transport and are popular with the creative classes.

Use half of your *escape fund* to enjoy a long and

restful vacation. Explore the city; relax cheaply or for free in parks, museums or libraries; make friends; invite old friends to visit; eat, drink and read. Enjoy yourself and celebrate your escape.

8. INVENT A COTTAGE INDUSTRY Use the rest of your time here—however much time your *escape fund* allows—to invent a way to ensure you'll never have to go back to work. Remind yourself of why you wanted to escape in the first place: the drudgery, the early mornings, the mindless submission, the waiting on pay cheques. Never forget the conditions from which you are escaping. Think up a cottage industry for yourself. It must be either (a) fully automated, requiring little work on your behalf or (b) fun. In either event, the income generated by your cottage industry must be equal to your *Cost of Living*.

Don't try too hard. Through your period of inactivity, you will probably discover over poolside Margarita what you want to do. If you need advice on how to concoct an automated

company, try *The 4-hour Workweek* by Timothy Ferriss in which he describes such a self-operating machine as a 'muse'. Fabian Kruse writes about this on page ??.

9. PUT YOUR PLAN IN MOTION from your apartment or from a public library. When the money starts to come in, you will have found yourself either a muse or a vocation. In short, you have escaped.

Try it. The worst case scenario is that your cottage industry fails and you have to go back to office drudgery, tail between your legs. If this happens, you will at least have enjoyed an extended vacation, lived abroad, tried and failed at entrepreneurship. This is better than what you'd have been doing otherwise. You'll have some interesting items to put on your cv and some great stories to tell in the pub. Best of all, there won't be anything to stop you from trying the whole thing again.

