envoy for the State Department, traveling to Argentina and Russia to talk to young people about life in the U.S. She found that public service wasn't so far removed from what she had been doing as a skater: bridging cultural gaps and connecting with people all over the world.

HER ADVICE "You're not starting from zero!" says Kwan. "What I learned in sports can be applied to any career. You have unique insights because you're coming from a different place."



FROM ATTORNEY...TO SURFING INSTRUCTOR

While in law school, Ashley Blaylock visited Nicaragua, where she learned about international human rights...and surfed epic waves every day. The Houston native relocated there, making great money as a foreign legal consultant. After the death of her grandmother, Blaylock followed her dream of opening a surf camp for girls, which she calls ChicaBrava ("brave girl"). "I realized we don't get a second chance at life," she says.

HOW SHE DID IT Blaylock's biggest fear was taking a financial hit. She saved like crazy, which helped her launch ChicaBrava without taking out loans or relying on investors. She kept her overhead low, picking up students from the airport in her own car so she didn't have to hire staff to do it. "I went back to being on a college budget," Blaylock says.

HER ADVICE "See what similar companies are doing, borrow from their wisdom, and learn to set yourself apart." You may also come across a mentor who has found success and has an interest in helping you succeed.



FROM AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE...TO INVENTOR

As a single mom of three, Joy Mangano needed her job working a ticket counter at JFK International Airport. But her true calling was invention: "I've been blowing up toasters since I was 12," she says. Now, Mangano is one of HSN's top-selling designers, famous for products like the Huggable Hanger.

HOW SHE DID IT While she was still working in the airline industry, Mangano developed a prototype for a self-wringing mop. She used basic materials (like an irrigation plumbing pipe) to create her design, then went to hardware stores and trade shows to demonstrate the concept, which became the Miracle Mop.

HER ADVICE "Set timelines for yourself," says Mangano, who pitched to 100 stores. "I gave myself a six-month trial deadline, knowing the task would not be easy. Give yourself smaller goals rather than one make-or-break deadline that can potentially crush you if it fails."

FROM CIA OPERATIONS OFFICER...TO WRITER

Emily Brandwin spent years as a spy at the Central Intelligence Agency. But the job wasn't as exciting as it seems on *Homeland*, and she felt worn down by the bureaucracy. At 30, she left to pursue more creative work.

HOW SHE DID IT To get started on her new career as a freelance writer and media personality, Brandwin immersed herself in getting inspired. She wanted to incorporate humor into her writing, so she took an improv-comedy class, which built up her "funny muscles," forced her to think quickly on her feet, and gave her confidence. She went to poetry readings, open mic nights, and theater shows. "You have to put yourself out there to grow your career," Brandwin says. "Meeting writers, producers, and agents was the way I was exposed to opportunities."

HER ADVICE "Ditch the ego," Brandwin says. After leaving the CIA, she was an assistant on a radio show and had to do things like feed a guest's pet monkey. Although the job didn't involve writing, it gave her an intro into the entertainment industry...and gave her some comedy material (see: pet monkey). "I realized I had to earn my way," she says. "My bosses didn't care that I had been a spy. They just wanted a hard worker."

