



A True Story of Midlife RE-creation: Eva Niewiadomski, Ranch Czarina at Catalyst Ranch

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Don't you love a good personal reinvention story? They are always inspiring to me, because when we're young, we think we've figured it all out. Until we realize that we haven't. That usually doesn't come until years of unsatisfying experiences in the job market. But, the courageous ones among us do reinvent themselves and sometimes do it through their careers. Or is it that they become their true selves and recreate their lives to match that?



EVA IN HER OFFICE AT CATALYST RANCH

Eva is one such person who successfully managed a career re-creation. I met her in her office at [Catalyst Ranch](#) in downtown Chicago. Right away upon seeing her, I admired what she was wearing and the fact that she could wear it to work: a (fantastic) denim dress adorned with a big acrylic and wooden bead & macramé necklace. She totally rocked it.

But, as the story goes, gaining the privilege to dress that way for a day-at-the-office was years in the making. And though this is not a fashion story, in this case, fashion and style (her own and her office décor) have been barometers of Eva's evolution.

By looking at Eva today you could never – ever – guess that she started her career in the very staid accounting and actuarial professions. She was brought up to be an independent, self-sufficient woman. Becoming an accountant was a safe way to achieve that goal some 30 years ago. Those were the days when Eva had three choices of career wear. Her skirt suits could either be black, grey or navy, to be worn with a blouse and a silk ribbon tie. Remember the silk ties? I wore them too. Ugh.

If you're also one who uses fashion as an expression of your spirit and creativity, you'll understand how stifling this would have been. But mostly, it's all about how symbolic these prescribed limitations were to Eva's creative side. Later, earning an MBA in Marketing & International Business and getting a new job in the finance department of a large CPG company were moves meant to quench her creative thirst. Well, at least she could wear a business dress there (only because she started the trend and made it OK). She also began dressing up her cubicle with colorful and inspiring artwork and toys. Still, the marketing department, with its potential for applied creative thinking, became more alluring every day. A request to switch from the finance department to the marketing department became multi-year quest (Seven years! That's tenacity). Once arrived as a brand manager, Eva extended and shared her creative mojo by setting up an Innovation Hallway for the division, equipped with colorful Velcro-able fabric wall panels, buckets of markers & post-its and brand information. Eventually, she set up was a Creativity Room where small groups could go off and think in an inspiring environment.

A few years later, the company merged with another, creating stress and culture clashes and putting Eva on the path to seeking new horizons.

That's when Eva's story of RE-creation and reinvention really began. Within a year of her serendipitous layoff, Eva opened Catalyst Ranch, a venue for offsite meetings. She went from employee to first-time entrepreneur, from audit manager to marketing manager, from corporate agent to Ranch Czarina...

She knew what she was doing though. Being a trained facilitator, Eva knew a few things about how to fuel creative spark and how to bring life in otherwise sterile offices and conference rooms. She took the opportunity – and her severance package – to unleash her vision for an entirely new sort of meeting space, one that would foster new ways of looking at old problems, that would not censor but promote new ideas and visions...

Catalyst Ranch is a completely unique space. Filled with vintage furniture, toys and eclectic artwork and accessories from around the globe, this is a space where you do not need permission to brainstorm your little heart out. It's a multi-sensorial safe haven where you can just know that there can be no bad ideas, no judgment, no censoring and where coloring outside the lines is actually encouraged.



CATALYST RANCH Polka Room



Creative thinking allowed in this meeting space!

Still, under all that funky décor, lies a very professional, fully functioning boutique conference space which supplies all the A/V equipment, meeting supplies, snacks, beverages and meals in a loft space divided into six large meeting rooms, one more quirkily enchanting than the other.

There's a timely reason for me telling you this story now. I am actually holding an event at Catalyst Ranch with my partners at Boombox Network. When I discovered this amazing event space I became so intrigued about how this venue came to be and who was behind it that I had to inquire. Eva's story is so entirely fitting with our B(L)oomers Party event theme of RE*creation that I had to share.

We could not have found a venue more appropriate to celebrate the many facets and interpretations of RE*creation. Not only has the Catalyst Ranch team been amazing at accommodating our needs and helping us organize the event, we know that the space itself got our event sponsors to understand the vision of the theme and the guests to look forward to the party.

From the '80's Dress-for-Success handbook to making her own rules in fashion and in business, Eva is one woman to look to for inspiration. So thankful to have met her. Just the thought of her story gives me "permission" to grow into myself and shake up a few things. Which sounds like fun, huh?