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John M. Galloway / Special to The Detroit News

Rod Brown left his career as a civil litigation attorney to become a partner in a men's clothing store.

### Career Makeover

## Ex-lawyer earns less, enjoys his work more

Brian J. O'Connor / The Detroit News

Advertisement

The song says you're never fully dressed without a smile, which means that during the years Rod Brown was a lawyer, he was definitely underdressed.

"It was never something that gave me great pleasure," says the 40-year-old West Bloomfield man. "Any courtroom appearance, I'd work myself up to the point where it was very taxing on me physically, as well."

Brown knows all about dressing well -- he gave up lawyering to become a manager and partner in The Shirt Box, a Farmington Hills

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men's store where he first worked as a 16-year-old stock boy. Now that he's doing something that really suits him, he's completely decked out -- including the smile. "I'm just happy to be where I am," Brown says.

**Where he came from:** Brown started working for Shirt Box owner Ron Elkus during high school, then on weekends and vacations during college.

While working on his undergraduate degree, he developed an interest in law and followed it through the University of Detroit law school. By 1992, he was a practicing civil litigator.

"I've always been a people person, and I think it was probably that area of the law did not jibe with my personality," Brown said. "The adversarial nature of the profession, to me it was one big choreographed game."

**What changed:** Still, it was a game Brown played for 13 years, until a health crisis and other problems caused him to re-examine what he was doing.

"I was 33 years old and I re-evaluated my circumstances," Brown says. "That was one very big wake-up call. I thought, 'I should be happy. I only get one shot at life and I have to find it.' "

**Moment of truth:** After his health problems passed, Brown started looking at other possibilities, including some business ideas with a friend.

Over the years, though, he had remained in contact with Shirt Box owner Elkus, and even still bought his clothes at the store.

"I called him one day out of the blue and said I'd like to talk about the possibility of joining the store," Brown says.

Brown's timing was right, since the store was replacing a manager who had left. Now he's becoming a partner in the store. He's also started making "house calls" to law firms so that busy attorneys don't have to leave the office to update their wardrobes.

"I used to specialize in automobile negligence," Brown jokes, "and now I specialize in making sure people don't commit haberdasherial malpractice."

**Stumbling blocks:** In the 3 1/2 years he's been back at the store, Brown says he's had very few difficulties adjusting. He knew going in that he would make less money, and he saved and adjusted his budget accordingly.

The real problems, he says, come from people who don't understand how he could leave the law. One lawyer who came into the store to do some shopping even offered to throw some legal



Lee Meadows, a professor of management at Walsh College. [See full image](#)

### Have you remade your career?

Did you switch from engineering to sales? Escape the boss from hell? Use your severance pay as seed money to start a small business? The Detroit News wants to hear from readers who've successfully remade their jobs, professions and careers for future stories. To tell your story, e-mail Personal Finance Editor Brian O'Connor at [boconnor@detnews.com](mailto:boconnor@detnews.com).

### Rod Brown

**Home:** West Bloomfield; three daughters

**Born:** Detroit, 1967

**Education:** Southfield-Lathrup High, 1985; MSU, 1989; U-D law school, 1992

**Old career:** Civil litigation attorney

**New career:** Partner in men's clothing store

### Work tips

"Rod Brown's career path is rooted in the idea that a dream delayed is not a dream denied," says Lee Meadows, a professor of management at Walsh College. "Sometimes you have to 'sidebar' from the path you're on in order to come full circle to the point that starts a new beginning."


Meadows says Brown's haberdashery journey was successful because of:

**An early appreciation for good service:** As a stock boy, Rod had an opportunity to observe the subtle, yet powerful elements of service to customers and the return on loyalty that it brings.

**An ability to see how events connect:** The stability of being a lawyer only served as a catalyst for broadening his perspective on how he could be successful once he returned to retail.

**An analysis of an untapped market:** Who better than a lawyer understands the daily grind of being not just a sharp-thinking lawyer, but a sharp-looking lawyer? Rod's time in the legal world showed him exactly how he could solve a time problem around choosing the latest fashions.

**A willingness to stop chasing the dream:** Rod knew that it was time to stop thinking about the dream and

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cases his way.

"There's this mind-set that you're leaving his professional where you're almost put on a pedestal by the public at large," Brown says. "He couldn't understand that I'm finally doing what I want to be doing."

**Words of wisdom:** Brown's advice to other career-changers is to have the courage to make a move in the first place.

"As difficult as it is to make the jump, you've got to try. You owe it to yourself to give it a try. Each of us deserves to be happy."

*You can reach Brian O'Connor at (313) 222-2145 or [boconnor@detroitnews.com](mailto:boconnor@detroitnews.com).*


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start acting on the happiness in haberdashery that it would bring.

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