

THE NUANCES OF WORK

How Subtleties Drive Success

Work must have life in it—vitality. —CLIFF HAKIM

TRANSITION

Transitions can be tricky.

Many of my clients want Hollywood change—a grand entrance to stardom! Real world change is different. Time and diligence are needed to unearth and identify the skills, values, and desires that lead to greater job satisfaction.

You might be moving from practitioner to manager, from organizational leader to entrepreneur, or business owner back into a corporate leadership role. Or the shift may be subtler, as you move from talker to listener, from seeing the glass half empty to seeing the glass half full, from demanding less to asking more. Along the way, you're bound to hit some bumps. As one of my clients said, "For a while, I felt confused, unsure what type of work appeals to me."

Confronting your expectations and ambivalence is an important step. I ask my clients to delve into the subtleties that drive their success—what they do best, how they want their workplace to be different, what makes the job worth it at the end of the day.

Marc, a corporate manager, ran a part-time yoga and healing studio, and was wary of giving up the security of his day job. "So I leave the company and put all my resources into growing my business. What if I don't succeed?"

That's where self-knowledge and reflection come in. Before making this decision, Marc needed to pull back and devote more time to his own feelings, before he could make a practical plan. What did he dislike about his corporate work? The endless hours, sitting at a desk. But, was he willing to devote himself to the rigor of advanced yoga certification and spend much of his weekend in the studio? Would he be making a greater contribution running a healing center?

After some soul searching Marc decided that the corporate world didn't have room for his collaborative style. He was sure he'd enjoy hiring and training people who were in tune with his philosophy. Plus the timing was right. "I just missed the axe for the third time during a recent layoff. It seems that at fifty, it is time for a more healthy life—to follow what I preach."

Isadora, a fashion designer, worked for a major clothing manufacturer but she was also freelancing, selling some of her own designs to small boutiques. She wanted to launch her own label, a bold, colorful and powerful style for professional women. After considering the hours it would take to run a business and be the top designer, she decided it was worth it. "In my corporate job, I'm following other people's rules. I have to strike out on my own, to tap into my creativity."

Marc and Isadora wisely considered what their new work life would have to offer, what its daily challenges would be, and how they would adapt to their new roles. They asked the right questions—and also allowed time for the answers to come into focus.

Joshua, a corporate attorney, was contemplating a move to a small town and to a smaller practice. “Before I make this decision,” he said, “I need to go fishing and decompress. To think this through clearly, it would help to get away from the office and its rigorous demands.”

When Zeke’s business failed, he took a lesson from his twenty-two year old son, who went hiking through Nepal. “My son is in the same boat, trying to figure out his relationships to the world of work. He thinks best while he’s backpacking. I get my best ideas while I’m running. When I’m out on the trails, it’s easier to clarify my goals and discover what I really want.”

Financial obligations, including mortgage and college tuition, may keep you moving too fast, and keep you from exploring your next transition. But remember this: it doesn’t cost anything to start the process of reflection.

The ego can throw up roadblocks as well—often it resists giving up the title above the door and starting over. Jim, who worked as an urban planner for twenty years, wanted to launch his own “green” consulting company. “For the past five years, I’ve resisting going for my dreams,” he said. “I like being an expert in my field. Yet to move on, I’ll have to live at the other end of the learning curve.”

In the weeks ahead, Jim signed up for a course in environmentally sound construction and did some informational interviewing. He let his humility surface and learned from industry leaders about the rewards of doing this kind of work. Reflection often involves not just asking yourself the right questions—but seeking help from others, too.

Here are some questions to help you move through your transition—whether you work for yourself, for a major organization, or have just lost your job:

- What activity (i.e. fishing, running, hiking, reading, or sharing my thoughts with others) allows me to enter a “stream of consciousness,” reflect on who I am, and brainstorm options for the future?
- Who can I trust and talk with about my concerns and hopes? Does this person have the patience and skill to listen to my yearnings? Will their feedback further my exploration?
- How can I align my work with my core values?
- What exactly has been missing in my day, and would the new direction I’m considering provide it?

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