

Create a Clearing *Preparing for Leadership Transition*

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This article provides a reflective leadership approach for career transition, whether that transition is part of your current plan or not.

Suggested reflections are meant to be part of a reflective leadership practice and may be revisited at several junctures along your career path.

By virtue of the fact that you are a leader, constantly seeking to shape a more desirable future for your team and organization, you are likewise on the journey to become the best possible version of yourself. Just as imagining a better future state of your organization is part of your strategy as a health care leader, picturing how your own personal future experience might unfold is critical in actually making it happen. The best version of yourself is likely to include how you express yourself and your life purpose through your work, as your career path. As a leader, your vitality will be strengthened by regularly conducting a personal exploration into who you are becoming, how your life circumstances are changing, and whether your current career role supports or detracts from your life purpose and your personal leadership mission.

Of course, this reflective process rests on the assumption that you *know* what your life purpose and leadership mission are. If you aren't clear on those things, or haven't thought about them for awhile, take a moment to refresh, remember, and possibly revise. You might want to write your life purpose and leadership mission in a simple sentence or 2 before reading the rest of this article. Keeping it to 1 or 2 sentences forces focus and prioritization. This clarity will make the process of considering a career transition more personally meaningful and less stressful because you will be aligning your decisions with your ideal best version of yourself as a human being and as a leader. By staying with what is true for you, you will cut through the distractions, using your time and energy instead on the things that reflect your values and purpose.

To put yourself in a state of preparedness (whether you plan to make a change soon or not), it is helpful to ask yourself some questions and deeply ponder the answers. The questions will help get you out of "analytic mode" and into a more reflective state where new insights and observations are likely to occur.

Consider your life's journey, specifically your career trajectory.

- Are you ready for a career transition?
- How will you know what to aspire to next?
- How can you tell that you are really ready?
- Are you seeking more responsibility, or do you want fewer demands?
- What kind of work is the right kind for you?
- What do you want from your life?
- How do you want to serve others?
- Are you deriving meaning and joy from your career, and if not, will this transition support you in doing so?

Each person's journey is unique; there is no exact recipe for career transition and success, especially in the leadership realm. However, it is the case, especially in the health care sector, that new roles and opportunities are opening quickly. And conversely, leadership positions may end abruptly for a variety of reasons. Thus, maintaining a state of personal preparedness to make a transition is a winning strategy.

The purpose of this article is to provide a reflective approach to preparedness for career transition, whether that transition is part of your current plan or not. The guiding questions contained here are meant to be thought-provoking and perhaps revisited at several junctures along your career

path. The following poem by Martha Postlethwaite¹ provides a beautiful frame for the process.

Clearing

By Martha Postlethwaite
Do not try to save
the whole world
or do anything grandiose.
Instead, create
a clearing
in the dense forest
of your life
and wait there
patiently,
until the song
that is your life
falls into your own cupped hands
and you recognize and greet it.
Only then will you know
how to give yourself
to this world
so worthy of rescue.

DO NOT TRY TO SAVE THE WHOLE WORLD OR DO ANYTHING GRANDIOSE.¹

When was the last time you were told to stop trying so hard to do everything, trying to save the whole world? Just for now, can you take this instruction to heart? "Do not try to save the whole world or do anything grandiose." Sometimes when we release our tight grasp on trying to do everything, be everything, please everyone, we actually get clear on what it is we *can* do or how it is we *can* be. In considering the following questions, please see if you can create a sense of adventure, of taking things seriously enough, but not inserting unnecessary drama or tension. The next few questions can be used to prepare you for the more concrete aspects of the decision to follow.

- What energizes you?
- What motivates you?
- What do you really love?
- Looking back on your career, what experiences are you most grateful for?
- If you were a very much younger version of yourself peering into your life now, what would you think? What would you say to the younger version of yourself?
- What was it that drew you to your current role? Is it still an active characteristic of your work?
- When you took your current role, what was your life circumstance? How has it changed?
- When you remember really making a positive difference, what was that like? How did it feel? How can you bring that type of experience into your present and future roles?
- What are career peak moments for you?
- How could bring ease to this work and to this decision in particular?
- If the career transition is happening without your input or control, how might you shape the situation (or your response to it)?

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