

What's Next?

Denise P. Kalm

DPK Coaching and CA, Inc.

You can barely sleep on Sunday night because you dread Monday morning so much. A new technology is announced and you can't make yourself care. You're burned out and yet, you can't afford to retire. What do you do? What's next?

When you are burned out, it's time for some careful self-examination. Life is too short to be unpleasant. In this situation, you can often feel stuck. Even if you have had this career your entire life, that doesn't mean change isn't in order. It is never too late to change. The most amazing career change I witnessed was an M.D. who is now teaching communication skills. Medicine was a vocation, a life-calling, at least, in my mind. But this man knew he had done his time and was ready to move on, even with the significant investment of time and money in his medical career. You are never THAT stuck.

Statistically, most people in their 40's and 50's will have had 3-5 careers – we simply work too many years to stay in the same job or even the same role. So ask yourself – would you rather just keep gutting it out until retirement? Or could it be better?

Most of us are very clear on what we don't want, on the things that make us unhappy in our current situation. But you can't dig yourself out of this hole with the same shovel that made it so deep. Try a new approach, and prepare to have some fun with it. Think about your dreams, the things you love to do and even, the things you dreamed of when you were young. In these ideas are the seeds from which to grow your future. Your heart knows what your head should be doing; now, let's tell your head all about it.

Too many people find they prefer a heavy boot kicking them out of their discomfort zone. I have met a number of IT layoff victims who created new careers, including singing, novel writing, two police officers, some small business owners and more. Not a single person is sorry they made this move, even if it cost them some time and money to achieve. It wasn't easy, but all agree it was worth it. None of them are looking back with longing on their discarded IT careers. One woman said she wasn't sure she wanted to go back to school to achieve her dream. "I'll be 50 years old by the time I start my new career," she said. "You'll be 50 years old in 4 years anyway," I noted. "Who would you rather be then? What would you rather be doing?"

Instead of offering you abstract concepts, I'll share my journey into my dream with you, hoping it will offer you a concrete example of how this works. In my

late 40's, I realized that I had had it. I had transformed my IT career a number of times, but I struggled with feelings of depression. I wasn't where I wanted to be. In fact, I was really afraid of getting laid off because I was sure I could not convince a new employer to hire me when I wasn't sure I wanted to do that job anymore.

And IT wasn't even my first career, so you'd think I'd know what to do. I gave myself the time to dream (and use a few helpful assessment tools) to help me figure out what was next for me. Initially, I planned to pursue an MFT and was actually enrolled in a grad school, but the schedule wasn't mapping out well with my work. I considered an online PhD program, but while I was putting it out there that I wanted a career that more directly served people, an unsolicited postcard arrived from a local college, inviting me to an orientation on their new coaching program. What's coaching? I wondered. But a few nights later, I went to the meeting, interviewed the next day and began classes two weeks later. And this time, though the class schedule (and homework) were challenging, it all worked out perfectly. I could arrange my work schedule around it. There were late nights and I wondered if I hadn't waited too long to do this, all the while remembering that my mother went to law school in her 50's, a far more challenging proposition.

So, how did I know it was right? A postcard and instant acceptance into a class is simply serendipity. I had been looking at what I still liked from my job (helping others achieve their goals, a brief stint as a technical manager, teaching, listening, speaking, writing) and what was missing (meaning). Being very clear on what made me happy made it much easier to recognize the right opportunity when it showed up. The hard work is conceiving the dream, getting really specific on what you love. But once you are clear on that, the ideas come, as do opportunities. I could see myself helping people transform their lives, being able to act as a catalyst for that transformation. I initially thought I would work with more troubled souls as a psychotherapist, but quickly learned that I enjoyed even more sharing the journey from good to great with my clients.

But you might ask – how am I still working in IT? While working on my graduate certificate, I began reinventing my job, making it into something I could still enjoy, while building my coaching business. I learned that I loved contributing with my speaking and writing skills, which meant developing those skills to a higher level. Then, using my coaching knowledge, I bring the people aspect into my writing and speaking in a way few others attempt. My dream still runs hot and keeps me energized in the present day. And by keeping the day job, while building the other, I have the luxury to give "scholarships" to coaching clients who need some help and who I really wish to work with.

There are great tools to help you find “what’s next” for you. Marcia Wieder’s Dream Coach web site also has some good resources. You can do it on your own, with the help of a trusted friend or with a coach. Don’t wait until the move is not your choice or until your health is suffering from this disconnect. In 4 years, you will be 4 years older – will you be okay if you are in exactly the same place you are now? Or could it be better? Shouldn’t it be better?

Even if you are reasonably content, are you following your dream? Could you transform the job you have now into one you could love?

“It’s time to start living the life you imagined.”

- Henry James

-

Stay tuned next month for another edition of “Your Career Coach.”