

The Fog of Transition

by Mary Ann Bailey, MC

I compare going through a life or career transition to setting sail on a foggy sea. As you begin your transition, you still have a good view of the shoreline. At this point, you may not even realize you are in a transition. You are very excited about the possibilities of changing a part of your life; and you can hardly wait to set sail and explore the distant shores.

Yet, as you sail further out to sea, or further into your transition, you lose sight of the coastline. The fog begins to settle in around you. You can't make out where you are going, and you can no longer see where you came from.

This feeling of drifting at sea with no port in sight can be very unnerving for many of us. We live in a culture that wants fast and definitive answers to our questions. We want quick solutions to our problems. And we want fast and easy ways out of the fog of transition.

The Discomfort of Uncertainty

So, when we find ourselves in the middle of this kind of uncertainty, it can be very easy to give in to the discomfort of not knowing exactly where we are going or what we need to do next. We hear critical voices telling us that we have made a mistake, or that we don't really have what it takes to find our way through the fog.

We begin to feel anxious and notice that our resolve to making the change is slowly slipping away. It is at this point when it can be easy to decide to quit the journey and return to the comfort of our old and familiar shoreline.

But if we let the voices of fear and doubt override the voices coming from our heart, we are apt to make decisions about our future that may not serve us well in the long run.

One of my clients, Anne, had always had an interest in graphic design. She recently had left her corporate job to pursue her life-long dream of starting her own graphics business.

In the beginning she was very motivated. She talked to people, gathered information, and started planning what she needed to do. Yet, as time went by and she found herself running into little snags, she began to question her initial decision.

She had made the choice to leave a comfortable, if somewhat stifling, world behind her, to set sail for a distant shore that she could only see in her heart; and for her that was very frightening.

Anne found being betwixt and between extremely uncomfortable and very anxiety producing. She began to question her ability to succeed, her commitment to her dream, and her overall desire to start a graphics business.

Although she was being encouraged to stay the course by me, as well as by many friends, she also was being pressured by other friends and family members to return to the security of the corporate world. In the end she made the decision to go back to her old job.

The Timing of Decisions

Whether this decision was the right one or not isn't really important. What is important is the timing of Anne's decision. She chose to go back to her old job when she was feeling the most scared and vulnerable. And ironically, it is at this very point, when we are at our lowest, that we need to put our full trust in the transition process.

We need to believe that if we keep ourselves open to the experience, and if we continue to move slowly towards our goal, we will eventually sail out of the fog and find ourselves in a new and wonderful place.

But this is a hard leap of faith for some people to make. Anne's decision was not really about her life plan. It was about relieving the discomfort she felt at that time. She was trading in her long-held dream for instant relief from a transitory uneasiness.

Staying one's course in the midst of confusion and doubt can be extremely difficult, but there are things that one can do to successfully navigate any transition.

Tips for Successful Transitions

First, before you set sail make sure that you have a strong support network in place. This network can consist of friends, colleagues, a spouse, a mentor, or a coach. Just make sure that they understand what you want and that they are willing and able to truly support you in your journey.

Second, familiarize yourself with the process of transition. The more you know what to expect, the better able you will be to withstand the times of uncertainty. Two of my favorite books on transition are: "The Way of Transition" by William Bridges and "Silver Linings" by Melissa Gayle West.

Third, remember that slow and steady wins the race. Listen to the voice in your heart, not the gremlins in your head. Use your support system when you start to waver.

And finally, always keep your dream in front of you as a constant beacon guiding you through the fog.

Mary Ann Bailey, MC, is a life coach who specializes in helping professionals successfully navigate the challenges of career and life transitions. Visit her website at www.baileycoaching.com to read more of her articles and to receive a free copy of "How to Make the Changes that Will Move Your Life Forward."