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Twelve Steps to Successful Transitioning

(Not necessarily in the right order!)

Susan Hilty

Transitioning

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. It was the best of times it was the worst of times. Who said that? It kept running through my head. Who was it that said that?

But, he just kept on talking and he wouldn't go away. I kept looking at him and seeing his mouth flap, there must be words coming out. Does he expect some reply from me? Does he know what he is saying? Maybe he will just go away.

What did that mean anyway? It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. Don't listen, if you don't hear the words, then maybe it will mean it is not happening. Don't listen; don't let down your guard. I think he is saying that they are going to have to let me go, that they are downsizing and that I don't need to come back to work tomorrow. Does that mean I can finally have a day off? That they finally sold this damned company and I will be able to for someone with a brain...It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, who was it that said that?

I was relegated to my last task, my last responsibility, of a very responsible position. Pack up your stuff and go. I had worked as the Network Administrator and finally as the Project Manager for a major manufacturing—retail organization for 7 years.

It was a long walk back to my office. There really was no way to even say good-bye to anyone, as we were all unsure of who was leaving and who was going to stay. Perhaps it was better to go, at least there was a clean break, kind of like that time I threw my cigarettes out. It was the best of times; it was the worst of times, just keep your mind off of what is happening until you get your last box in the car.

One step at a time: First you get to your office, gather up “your stuff”, and then shuffle out to the car with “your stuff”. This is first-rate management.

I really don't know if the box was that heavy or if it was all of the other burdens I was carrying out to the car. Seven years is a long time, but how much can you really accumulate of “your stuff” at work. And how do you really know it is “your stuff”. You're not supposed to be living there, are you?

Now I am in the car and on the way home. I think I am in the stage of my life, lovingly referred to by those who have gone before, as “TRANSITIONING”, whatever that means. Oh well, I guess it will set in soon and then I will be able to share my infinite wisdom of the world with those that follow in my footsteps. No one ever said you would be able to stay in a job forever. Now, according to the statistics I had seen, a “job” usually lasted two years, and I have been there for seven.

Opportunity always comes knocking.

I never left a job that I didn't find a better one.

Good things come to those who wait.

Patience.

Who comes up with all this crap, obviously not the guy who just lost his job? I felt damned miserable about it. It was my turn to have an “ain't-it-awful” day and I was going to revel in it. Maybe I am in shock, I just don't seem that upset. All these emotions, perhaps it's gone now, my mine, maybe I will find some pieces of it in one of the boxes in the trunk. But for now, what was I going to tell everyone? I've got it; I can tell everyone that I've decided to take an early retirement. I always wanted to get my degree and decided today was the day.

I think the story needs a little refining. Isn't it always ironic? We had just talked this morning and Linda had told me it was a really good thing I had just gotten that big raise and promotion, because her company was a little unstable and it was rumored it was up for sale. Wouldn't that just be the end to beat all?

It was the best of times it was the worst of times. They say that if you get something stuck in your mind you eventually lose control, but I didn't and I made it home. Maybe now I would have some time to look up who had actually said that.

Linda and I actually went out and celebrated. I hadn't ever really liked that job anyway. We'd been saving in case she got laid off. We were in good shape financially and sometimes you need a life-changing event when you get stuck in a rut and you can't find your own way out.

Job Clubs

After my period of mourning, (some great psychologists made the analogy) I decided I needed to do something to entertain myself. Sitting around at home sounds good when there are people running in and out of your office all day long, but it's not exactly all that it is cracked up to be when you've lost a little of your self-esteem. It seems to me that "you" are not exactly the person that is the most up beat and motivational to hang out with.

In my search for a job, I heard rumors there were "JOB CLUBS" full of folks, like me, who were "transitioning". Who'd have thought to start a club for a bunch of uninspired, "ain't-it-awful" people? Better still, who would have wished it upon them self to be the ring-leader?

Well I loaded up my pride, stopped off at the local Dunkin Donuts and headed out in search of my destiny. This must be what transitioning is all about.

Not to disappoint me, there they were, one of the sorriest groups of humanity that I had seen lumped together in one small confined area for quite sometime. Then true to the calling of the person leading the group, there she was. A woman in her mid to late fifties, bottle blond hair (you could tell because of the gray coming back in at the part), the cigarette breath and the blue knit pant suit. She introduced herself as the leader and told us that she was a "grief counselor" for the local community; she was here to help us through this time of crisis. In my wildest dreams, never would I have been able to imagine such a thing.

We were to go around the room and introduce ourselves, fine-tune a 30-second speech about whom we were and what we wanted to be when we grew up. THEN, she wanted us to tell the group, the date by which we were going to be back to work! (If I knew that, I could get a job as the chief consultant at a local church for only GOD knew that secret and for some I was sure it might never come to fruition).

Well we were off to our "twelve step program" to another heartbreak and disappointment. As you may well have gleaned by now, there was no way in hell this group of losers was going to be going back to work any time soon and setting that time line was surely a goal for disappointment. What did one do when the day came and they were still showing up at the job club? The deal was when you got hired you were to bring doughnuts and flowers for the next meeting. No one there really needed the doughnuts, but I suppose that is how grief counselors see life, and death.

So We Started the Session

First there is the guy who is sure he had been discriminated against due to his age. 'I was making too much money and those new young whipper snappers didn't know anything, least of all how to make money. They just thought if they came in and fired all of us old guys, no

Well I am sure that t30-second spiel will get him a great new job.

Number two for today's meeting, was a little weasel that had worked for his father, his whole life. He must have been at least 45, where was he going?

'My name is Ralph and I am looking for a position as a PC Technician. My father and I have always run this business and we just can't seem to get enough customers to keep us afloat. I have a job with the local school district, if I can go pass the certification test. I am sure this is not a problem, I just don't have the \$100.'

Well Ralph was off to a long waiting list, maybe we could all get together and have a garage sale for him? I could bring the doughnuts.

There was the woman that had all of life's answers, except what color really goes with purple anyway.

'My name is Mary McConnell, I was the executive assistant for the CEO at Growers. I ran the place for him and he never even realized what was going on. I paid the bills, ordered the flowers, and answered all of the phone calls. I ran the business. I mean I knew everything that was going on and he knew nothing. I don't know why he closed the store or why we couldn't make any money, but I am looking for a position as a manager in another floral business.'

Well, good luck because let's face it, your hair-dresser isn't the only one that knows and I can probably give you a little advice on the fact that you knew everything and you ran the business, right into the ground obviously.

Next is a heavy set balding man of about 70. Third time is a charm. He has on a suit, or what is left of a suit. His credentials include Chief Financial Officer for a small community college, and he wants to do the same thing. (There is only one small community college in the area and the man is not willing to move).

'My name is Willy White, I was a successful CFO for a small community college. I was not making enough money so I gave them my notice and left. I have been looking for a position as a CFO at another small community college for over a year now. I can't move, but I know there is a place for me out there.'

Not to be left out were the folks that could not speak complete sentences and the man that cried for his 30-seconds. Is it break time yet? I think I need to leave... I am so depressed. Maybe the grief counselor really is a good idea after all.

Okay, so I was wrong, I hadn't lost my mind yet. It is a long and tedious process. I knew I had come to the right place to help me proceed along that path. What was I doing here? It seemed to me to be from one of the *Job Club for Dummies* books, only these people had taken it literally. Let me out of here...

My patience is wearing thin as we go into yet another round...

Next came the life is unfair man and his wife, "Hi! We are Sam and Sandy Williams. We worked for the same company for the last 25 years and now we are aspiring to obtain positions as managers, because we visited Bernie Maldane yesterday, and Bernie said all we need to do is think positive thoughts and network with everyone we know. Our day will come and our talent will be recognized."(Call me cynical, but I was skeptical).

Same continued on, "They only charged us \$6000 each and gave us a resume writing class and a phone help class".

For God's Sake, are you all really that stupid or maybe it is my naivete in the job search process? I was sure that Bernie Maldane would take my \$6,000 and I would be on a great adventure to success. As I said, I hadn't lost my mind yet, maybe next week. I wonder which office that couple had gone to; maybe they could give me the guy's card.

Oh no, it's my turn and I haven't thought of anything quaint and stupendous. Step 5;

always leave them with something to remember you by. Duh!!! Should not be the norm.

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Wow, I think this is what it must be like at the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. They too, have a twelve-step program. Maybe we could incorporate?

The Self-improvement Class

Okay, now you've done it, the State Department of "Unemployment", as everyone lovingly refers to it, contacted me and they have a new program for those that are "transitioning" (there's that word again, I wonder what it really means?). I was "cordially invited" to attend, Government language for you'd better be there or we'll shut off those piddly checks you've been getting. How could I possibly not accept?

This particular one was on how to sell yourself over the phone. My mother probably would not have approved of the title, but I have to admit it did sound a little intriguing. So I rummaged through all of the cups and little boxes for change, loaded up the car, stopped off at Krispy Kreme as it was on the way and if I recall Step number 3 from that last job club thingy was to always reward yourself to build up your self-esteem. These are dire times and one must remain upbeat and motivated. A little sugar rush and caffeine were just the thing I needed, along with some whiny country song blasting in the background as I rolled along with the windows down.

Well once again, the sell yourself on the phone wasn't quite what had been promised. After all, these people are dealing with a bunch of losers, what did we really expect for free; there they go with some more of those expressions. I will have to admit the state had gotten a few things together and the woman that was teaching the class did seem to have a little bit going for her. I just don't know how she could have gotten herself into this. She seemed reasonably intelligent, just out of school with a degree in teaching. She even was dressed up a little today for the occasion.

Today we were to go around the room and pretend we were talking on the phone to someone. You randomly search the phone book for a company name of someplace you think you would like to work. Then you call the number, find a unique way to get through the gatekeeper to the person that would be doing the hiring, if they were hiring.

Now this is where it gets tricky. If you are applying for HR, the HR manager is usually the one answering these calls, or they have an admin. Now how do these people think you can get through the gatekeeper and tell the person on the other end of the phone, you want to know if they are going to be leaving their position any time soon as you are looking for a job and you think their job is the one you are looking for. There are similar problems in all of these scenarios. I know, I am being negative again.

Step 8 was something to do with "what do you think" and "how does that make you feel?". Well right about now, kind of like shit, but thanks for asking. I know money doesn't grow on trees and times are hard. Remember me, I am the one digging change out of the cough for my Krispy Kreme reward.

Here we go it's my turn as I get the hand off the pretend phone, "Good afternoon, is Mr. Smith in please."

'Yes, I am calling to tell him that I am the most wonderful person in the whole wide world. That he has never been able to run his business correctly and perhaps never will be able to meet his full potential unless you put him on the phone immediately, I must tell him how to be more successful than he has ever been before. You see he needs me because I am out here wandering around with nothing but time on my hands, and a little of that frosting from my Krispy Kreme.'

"I am so smart that I worked myself out of a job and I am looking for the opportunity to

repeat this great accomplishment over and over again. Please tell him that I called and I will be following up to set up an interview with him next Wednesday. How does 4 o'clock sound and when do you think I will be able to start." (Step 1, always ask for the job).

At least they are all looking at me with a look of reprieve. How can she be angry with "them" after that display? Maybe we all need to take ourselves a little less seriously.

I got the self-improvement class with the resume writing and it didn't even cost \$6000. I am making money and not even working! I am sure this woman has a lot better personality than Bernie Maldane and I am also sure she is not nearly as slick. What do you think Sam and Sandy are doing now? Maybe I should check. If they are managers somewhere, they might need a good project manager.

Step #10 Network

Step # 10 is network. This is a good piece of advice. Misery loves company. Now all I have to do is find some sucker that I can latch onto that will listen to my tale of woe. We can sit around at Starbucks and play the "ain't-it-awful" game. You know the one, where you say, "Well if you think that's bad..." I was getting good at it by now. The choice was clearly mine, I was going to be successful at networking. I could drink as much coffee and beer as the next person. This would be my great success story, because above all else you need time for yourself, Step #7, and Step #8 was to find something that you did well, so you could have that feeling of accomplishment.

The problem I was having was that I never seemed to find anyone that pointed me in the right direction. They just seemed to bring me down deeper and deeper into that cycle of begging for a job and self-pity.

I even had a couple of recruiters tell me that they only got jobs for people that had jobs because it was easier to sell them as prime candidates. I don't think I will ever use a recruiter for that reason. I am sure, with my new pessimistic outlook, that if they do that for one company they must do it for all of them. Didn't they realize that with that representation the prognosis would be one of what would stop them from raiding my company?

The Interview

Alrighty then, I got my first acceptance letter today. That meant I had been accepted to participate in the interview process. Sometimes it can be compared to the psychiatric testing that is being done, only in this one they use humans instead of animals, because it would be inhumane to use animals.

First you fill out the application, even though you have just gone through the phone interview process and they have a copy of your resume. The one that you faxed, emailed and sent by mail, then the one that you brought six copies in for them to use during the interview. You still need to fill out their application, and take the personality test, and take the math test, and take the drug test. The last place I went even required a physical.

This is my story and I am sticking to it. The letter stated that I had been selected to appear for a short interview for the position of "ARTIST". Now I used to draw a little back in the old days, but hadn't done anything recently.

How did this happen? It was probably one of those days that the "help wanted" web page had been a little funky and when I did my query it worked as all good technological applications do and matched me up with some really unique jobs.

We searched our database and came up with your magnetic ink. According to your fingerprint and the last four number of your driver's license, through some mathematical equation and correlation of your social security number, this is what we think you should be applying for, so

I did. Step 9 clearly stated that you should never underestimate your talents.

Maybe they were more insightful than I, because I had just been invited to reply and schedule an interview.

I tried calling the company and got a very “efficient” voice message that told me if I knew the person’s extension they could route me there immediately, but if I did not I should stay on the line and someone would assist me. Maybe that was the person they were looking for, it obviously took an artistic and inventive person to come up with that line. I waited, I waited, I waited, I waited, they lied. I truly don’t think there was anyone there and I knew by the amount of time it was taking, they were not going to assist me.

I replied with great exuberance via email and was told to appear at 2 PM the following day as we sent emails back and forth. (All this via email to Kristin, the receptionist, so I was unable to explain, ask questions, or clarify).

Upon arrival I was given “*the application*”. Don’t you just get writer’s block?

(Why should I give them all of this information, I don’t even know them and it’s not as if it’s going on my permanent record somewhere, what does that mean anyway?)

What is a permanent record? All of the Doctor’s offices throw out everything after 7 years. Oh, wow, an epiphany, I worked at that last place 7 years, maybe they had doctor’s accountants working there and that signified the end. What year was that anyway, I need it for this next box).

Whew, after 20 minutes I got through that.

I sat in the lobby catching up on the latest news, let’s see this is 2005 and the PC magazine is talking about this new guy Bill Gates? I was always going to try and find this issue where is my note pad.

Horrors, they are talking about me. Shhhh!

‘It says here that she is clearly not an artist, but a Project Manager’, says Kristin, ‘now what do I do?’

Well they discussed and discussed. I knew there was not a snowball’s chance in hell I was going to get that job as an “artist”. They made me wait in the lobby for over an hour while they found someone to talk to me and I just kept reading those *historical* facts from the magazines they provided. I had learned those steps well and Step #2 was never back down from a show down, especially when you have the upper hand. There was no way she was admitting to me she had made a mistake. So, I waited.

She found someone to talk to me. The pressure was off and I really had a good time not letting them off the hook. I was having such a good time, the interviewer started to relax and enjoy himself. Then three hours later, I was asked back for a second interview as a Project Manager. Upon arrival the second time Kristin was no longer there, maybe someone had brought it to her attention she was not that good.

The Moral of the Story

Following the 12 steps of this program will probably not get you anywhere; except maybe out of the “aint-it-awful doldrums”. I know it’s hard work out there, but always remember: I felt sorry for myself because I had no shoes and then I saw a man that had no feet. I know, I know, what a load of crap. Who comes up with this stuff anyway?

Step #13 – always maintain your sense of humor or as a wise old fellow once told me, “Cheer up things could get worse, so I did and sure enough.”

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. Now I remember, Charles Dickens was the one that said that. Maybe now I can read that book again...

Oh well, Good Luck to you all as you pursue your dreams and remember Step 4: Try not to act stupid and never, never let anything surprise you. The world is a truly amazing place.