

The Reality of the Early Days

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WHILE INTELLECTUALLY you can process and agree that three months is a long time, it's not long enough to make the switch from 14 meetings a day to none. And it's also not long enough to get things in motion, especially when you take the needed pause. Things simply take a long time, and reconciling the need for a break, with the need to occupy your time, doesn't come easily nor naturally.

While there is peace and joy from stepping away from the craziness of the executive life, the resulting silence can be deafening and the absence of externally imposed activities, jarring. Everything you try to do simply takes longer. It's a hard reality to adjust to. In fact, it feels like everything moves at a snail's pace, compared to what you are used to and what you just walked away from.

When you are going through this in the early months, there are natural emotions that, while part of the process, feel incredibly unfamiliar. You are used to leading, making decisions, and having people listen and follow those decisions—but suddenly, there are no followers, and you feel irrelevant. You worry that people are going to forget about you and about what you did, despite your being told, often, that folks at your former company are still feeling the void left by your absence and trying to adjust to life there without you.

It's hard to reconcile it all, really. My message to future peers-in-transition: expect the early months to be hard, and be gentle with yourself as you navigate through them. It's all part of the process—but the process is not always easy.

My second piece of advice: be intentional about involving your spouse early in the process.

As executives, we are used to getting our own way. Participative decision processes do not come naturally. Once you step away from your corporate life, you are still playing the game of life, but your event has gone from an individual sport to a team sport, and you have an equal partner to help you decide what plays to run and when. It's an adjustment. It requires a lot of listening and a behavior change relative to how you have operated successfully for decades.

The advice I received and heed: *be patient; embrace the importance of getting/feeling physically well first; and focus on reconnecting with people attached to things of interest to you.* That includes your spouse. In my case, I have been nominated for two boards, which is part of what I was hoping to do in my Next Season . . . but even that process is slow relative to what I am used to. And so, I have created shorter-term projects as I lay track for longer-term things like boards or other leadership roles.

My final observation: navigating the transition with the support and friendship of my Advisor, Leslie Braksick, helped me so much. It is guidance I sought and benefited from greatly. I am glad I did not try and go it alone. Her experience with so many details of a transition like mine remains invaluable as I progress to my Next Season.

