

The Lunch

I flew to New York to have lunch with a client who was preparing to “retire.” From the moment I laid eyes on Matthew at the restaurant, I could tell he was anxious. We were barely seated when he confessed, “Leslie, I am a wreck. Honestly. I am just so upset. I have read your book, your articles, and I have known you for seven years . . . but despite that, with all due respect, I feel so unprepared for this.” (Nothing like getting an unprompted performance review of your effectiveness in helping people prepare for their transitions!)

Matt’s emotions poured out of him with barely a pause between sentences. “This isn’t a career transition; this is a reinvention of personhood. I feel like I am losing everything about who I am. When I leave this job, I leave my peers, my purpose, my role, my focus, my calendar of where I am to be, what I am to do. My whole existence is gone. This is

not a career transition. It’s a complete loss of identity and an unwelcomed one at that. I have never felt more unsettled. Moreover, I am 62—so who is going to want me? I am too young to retire and too old to join some next-gen management team. It’s not about money. I am set financially—but what will I do? My heart is racing; I feel sick to my stomach; I can’t sleep; and my wife says I am driving her crazy!”

In that moment I was transported to sitting in my church pew . . . and experiencing the chasm between calmly praying at arm’s length for strangers facing tragedy, versus personally receiving a diagnosis. When life events become personal, everything changes.

Perhaps, since we all face job/career transitions in our lives, we need to make it personal sooner and begin preparing for it concretely and earlier, versus waiting until it is upon us. Then we can sort through the options with

less emotion and panic and without the distorted view that this is the-end-versus-a beginning. Time is a huge variable in this, and we want it on our side.

In reality, a 62-year-old-ish professional like my client has immense experience to share with others, and bountiful options! He has experiences, learnings, discoveries, disappointments . . . unlimited ideas that can, and will, shape the thinking and work of others—officially or unofficially.

Yes, there is the important step of reimagining—or discerning, as we call it—one’s future, which requires pausing to contemplate something other than what you’ve been doing. And once that reimagining has taken place, there is a pragmatic need to rebrand yourself—on paper and online—so organizations and people can see you/find you in a new light. But beyond that, you can be matched with people who offer new opportunities and possibilities, and these people will be so grateful to match your skills and experiences with their needs.

So, is it “The End”? Of course not! New identities, yes. New possibilities, yes. Reinventions, yes. And new beginnings? Yes! But start early. Don’t wait until the change is upon you take planning steps for what’s next.



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My Next Season helps companies and individuals with important career transitions, from early career to “retirement,” and ensures they happen well.

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