

IN TRANSITION? DON'T HURRY.

by Glenn Williams



After nearly 25 years as an executive, my season ended differently than I had expected. What I didn't fully appreciate was how much my identity and reputation had revolved around my role and effectiveness as a leader.

Many transition experiences can be traumatic and confusing, and because of this we either avoid them or want to get through them as quickly as possible and find a place of comfort. Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher, describes this attitude as 'the middle condition', where –

"We have found a way to escape the forms of negation, exile, emptiness, without having reached fullness. We come to terms with the middle position, often through some stable, even routine order in life, in which we are doing things which have some meaning for us" (Taylor, 2007, pp. 54).

I believe Taylor would argue, that leaders who are unable to process and learn from periods of transition and isolation, mistakenly avoid attaching a greater purpose or sense of meaning to what they are going through. They might move on, but they do so in a less-fulfilled way.

In her book, *Isolation – A Place of Transformation in the Life of a Leader*, Shelley Trebesch encourages leaders who are going through a period of voluntary, or involuntary isolation, to process the time of transition more deeply in order to better understand what is needed for what comes next (Trebesch, 1997, pp. vii).

Whether you prescribe to her Christian worldview or not, Trebesch offers some interesting insights, from which I will highlight two.

First, she addresses the process of 'stripping' away an identity that a leader has become dependent on, which can also hinder growth in other areas. This is where leaders operate out of their strengths while ignoring other areas that need development.

Second, for leaders to look to the future with a different lens; a more meaningful and longer-term perspective. While there is the temptation to get out of this awkward place as quickly as possible, Trebesch argues that to do so interrupts a process that can transform the person.

What's the bottom-line?

What made you a successful leader and helped you get to where you are now is not necessarily what you need to get to where you want to go next. In transition, there is an opportunity to write a new story.

Below are some helpful reflections:

- Embark on an honest time of reflection on how you came to be in this situation – don't avoid what might have caused it.
- Find a mentor or coach who can help you maintain a healthy mindset and reduce the risk of

becoming too self-critical or judgmental of others who contributed to your 'downfall'.

- Journal throughout the season, identifying the key things you have learned, progress that has been made and questions that still need to be answered.
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References

Taylor, Charlies. (2007). *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Trebesch, Shelley. (1997). *Isolation – A Place of Transformation in the Life of a Leader*. Altadena, California: Barnabas Publishers, 1997), vii.