

THE STRUGGLE OF BEING 'IN-BETWEEN'

by Glenn Williams



As a child growing up in the 1960's and 70's, 'Gilligan', 'Skipper', the 'Howells', 'Ginger, the movie star', 'The Professor' and 'Mary Ann' were familiar names as characters in CBS' hit television series, *Gilligan's Island*.

For 98 episodes the characters looked for a way to get off the island where they had become shipwrecked and return to their normal lives.

Sometimes, we also get this feeling of being 'marooned' during significant transitions; the struggle of being in between things. One moment we are relatively comfortable, the next we feel isolated and disoriented.

Most leadership literature focuses on how to be successful, lead people better, build stronger teams, be more productive and so on. However, leaders are rarely encouraged to stop and reflect, instead they press ahead and maintain momentum as if the *activity equates to productivity* (Forrester, 2011).

For leaders who have been dismissed from a senior position, it's not hard to imagine how the loss of identity can cause significant pain and a profound sense of loss. This loss is also felt by those considering retirement.

But we all deal with transitions in different ways. Some use it as a period of self-evaluation and self-improvement. What can I learn from this experience? Could I have done something differently? Others want to move on quickly and focus on what might be next.

Successful businessman and entrepreneur, Bob Buford, likened some of these transitions to a person's 'half-time'—a season when people realize that their success and influence no longer brings the fulfilment it once did, or maybe it never did. He argues this can be a defining moment in the life of leaders who have always been in charge. What they do next is critical!

What's the bottom-line?

Buford encourages people to identify their strengths and passions and be open to exploring something different rather than default to what is comfortable.

Consider these reflections

- Career transitions always have corresponding emotions. Don't deny them or pretend they don't exist. Acknowledging them as a normal part of the grieving process is the first step towards moving on;
- If you allow your identity to be strongly linked to a performance orientation you will be constantly at the mercy of other people's expectations (and your own!);

- Understand your CORE. What are you good at? What strengths or talents do you have? What are you passionate about?
 - Understand your CAPACITY. How full or cluttered is your life? Try and create some margin in your life to help you evaluate this new and unfamiliar stage in your life.
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References

- Buford, Bob. (2008). *Halftime: Moving from Success to Significance*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.
- Forrester, Daniel Patrick. (2011). *Consider: Harnessing the Power of Reflective Thinking in Your Organization*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.