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Quotable Quotes

"Changing careers means changing ourselves. Since we are many selves, changing is not a process of swapping one identity for another but rather a transition process in which we reconfigure the full set of possibilities." ~ from Working Identity by Herminia Ibarra

"It is when we are in transition that we are most completely alive." ~ from the Way of Transition by William Bridges

Dear Jean,

Our featured writer this month is Gail Summers, a veteran with 20 years of experience in performance improvement with a specialty in leadership training, safety and coaching. Gail is a certified coach with the Hudson Institute of Coaching, located in Santa Barbara and has a masters degree in Organizational Learning & Instructional Technologies and holds the Certified Safety Professional (CSP) designation. Her experience includes the military, university, healthcare and national laboratory settings.

Gail's business, BayLeaf Performance Consulting, LLC is a woman-owned small business offering consulting specialties in performance improvement and strategic planning. Her coaching specialties include Leadership, ADD/ADHD and Transition.

I have known Gail for a number of years as we both worked for contractors to the Department of Energy designing training and performance solutions. Her contact info has been at the top of my "Go To" list for a number of years. She is known for her focus and ability to plan and this has been so evident in the last two years as she moved through her transition to becoming a business owner. I am in awe of Gail's dedication and commitment to establishing her business thoughtfully and always in honor of her clients' success. And I am so very excited for her as she pursues her other passion and talent for writing - that novel is coming! She experiences a renewal daily as she pursues her own personal process of transition.

What a gift she is giving us all - a better understanding of how we can manage our own transitions!

In the spirit of sharing our gifts,

Jean

Renewal: A Process of Transition by Gail Summers

Spring is here. Yes, trees are budding, days last longer, school is almost out and the air is warmer. But, have you noticed, spring often arrives with a feeling of anticipation, of planning summer vacations, planting new gardens or seeing new calves in the fields. For some, spring is famous for starting over such as spring cleaning or mending fences in the fields. Spring is a time of renewal, of new growth, a transition time that emerges from the quiet hibernating, sometimes frigid winter to transform into the beauty and passion of summer.



Spring. People need it, too. Sometimes, we find our lives stuck. Using the images of the seasons, we sometimes get stuck in a long cold winter. We might find ourselves stuck in a job or career, a way of life or way of existing that we would like to transform. Perhaps, we had a monumental change thrust upon us, a layoff, a divorce or a death in our family, especially the death of a spouse. How do we find renewal or reinvent ourselves? How do we find spring?

First, renewal, reinvention or the concept of changing your life is a process, not a magic act or a miracle. Consider that transition means transit, which is a voyage from one place to another. In other words, transition is a journey. In his book, *The Way of Transition*, William Bridges describes the transition process as having three phases - the ending, the Neutral Zone and the beginning. The transition process almost always starts with an ending. The ending could be a job, a career, a way of living, a divorce, a death. In the Neutral Zone, according to Bridges, we often have one foot in an old life and one foot in a new life. Because of this, the Neutral Zone can be a confusing, questioning, unknown place. It is also a place where you can ask questions, consider possibilities or mourn a loss. For us to complete the transition process and emerge renewed or reinvented, we must complete the "work" of the Neutral Zone. Just like the trees, we must complete the "work" of winter before they can bud in Spring. In her book, *Working Identity*, Herminia Ibarra describes something similar. She also describes transition as a process, as an in-between period, a psychological zone in which we are between selves. She writes that this is the zone where we can explore and learn, make new connections, learn who we are and who we are not.

Second, the key to the transition process is time, especially when we are in the Neutral Zone. How much time we need is different for each person. This means, every person can approach renewal or reinvention at their own pace. For some people, the transition could take years. For example, a young mother may want to be an artist. She may need time to fully understand this, then more time to save money for art school, or she may wait until her children are older. She may want to experiment with art technique or meet other artists. Her way of life could change. Her friends could change. It doesn't matter how much time she takes, it only matters she is on the journey. So, if you decide to go to the Neutral Zone, stay there until the time is right for you to step out. It can be a wonderful and healing place, where you can do your work: explore and learn, be confused and question, have quiet time or grieve a loved one. If someone asks, just say, "I'm in the Neutral Zone or I am waiting for spring."

Tools and Resources

FROM THE BOOKSHELF

Working Identity by Herminia Ibarra

This is an excellent resource for those who wish to change or reinvent their career.

The Way of Transition by William Bridges

This resource is critical for anyone who is trying to reinvent their lives due to an unexpected change in their life, especially a loss.

THE INTERNET CONNECTIONS

[William Bridges & Associates](#) - Click on the tab for "Articles" to read and download articles about both organizational and individual transition.

[Fishers Process of Personal Change](#) - features the Process of Transition Diagram by John Fisher, which tells the story of personal transition in different and light hearted terms. The [home page](#) is provided by Alan Chapman of Leicester, England. Web site is a free resource pertaining to learning and development. Of particular interest is the Kubler-Ross Stages of Grief model and related materials pertaining to change.

Reflection

So, are you wondering if you even need to, or want to, reinvent or renew yourself? Here are some questions that might help you find answers.

What is the payoff? There is usually a payoff, or a reason, for everything we do. Sometimes, we recognize the payoff instantly. Sometimes, we don't know the pay off because it is hidden deep in us or we simply have not thought about it. Go ahead - take a minute to think about it. What is the payoff FOR NOT changing or reinventing yourself? This question asks what happens if you do nothing, maintain the status quo. Do you like the answer? Or does the answer make you uneasy, or even queasy? Now, think about the same question in reverse. What is the payoff FOR changing or reinventing yourself? Do you like this answer? Or, do you like this answer, but it scares you? There is no right or wrong answer to the payoff question, it is more about probing what will happen if you decide to take or not take action, about uncovering what might be best for you.

Next, what learning needs to be done? Learning often takes two forms or two processes. The first process is about things that are new. Think about it. To reinvent yourself or find renewal, what new things do you have to learn? Sometimes, these things are related to education or specific skills or the "how to" of things. For example, on the career and professional side, a manager may have to learn how to act and look like an executive before getting promoted to an executive position. A person who has been laid off may have to, or want to, learn an entirely new career. On the personal and private side, a person who has just lost a spouse or undergone a divorce may have to learn how to live without their "other half." Then, think about the question in reverse. What do you have to unlearn? Like the fall leaves on a lovely maple tree, what do you need to let go of so that you can bloom again? For example, in the professional world, perhaps the strategies and behaviors that made you successful to date will not help you be successful in the future or get to the next level. Or, perhaps, it is something more intangible. Perhaps, it is fear that needs to be unlearned. Perhaps, the "golden handcuffs" of a good-paying but passion-less job that needs to be unlearned or let go. Again, there is no right or wrong answer here. It is simply about learning.

As you reflect on these questions, don't be surprised if the answers surprise you, make you nervous or strike fear in your heart. This is good. It means the answers are important and the stakes are high. You are now invited to go the Neutral Zone.

Choose To ...

Enter the Neutral Zone. Explore new possibilities for yourself. Experiment with new ways of living, working and playing. Learn from your exploring and experimenting. Explore some more. Stay in the Neutral Zone until you have learned enough to step out.



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My Constructive Choices Audience...

- * Professionals wanting to be at choice in their career and daily work,
- * New managers (and aspiring leaders) transitioning to establish a leadership role in their communities,
- * Individuals wanting to sort through the choices, build a more fulfilling life, life their voices, and...
- * Coaches who choose to step out, show up, and say - YES, it IS all about YOU!

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