



Transitions: Fight, Flee, or Flow?

It's that time of year again. For many of us who are parents, it's the time to transition from the carefree days of summer to the more structured, scheduled days of school. Perhaps you don't have a school age child, but are coping with being an empty nester for the first time, are switching jobs, coping with the loss of a loved one, dealing with a break-up, or are moving. We all go through transitions in life; they are inevitable. How we deal with them has a strong impact on our wellness.

In thinking about how we manage transitions, I believe there are three modes: you can fight it, you can flee from it and deny it's happening, or you can flow with it. **What is your tendency when faced with a transition?** Personally, I wasn't ready for the kids to go back to school (although I know many parents who beg to differ). There was a period of time there where I wanted to deny that it was happening. I quietly filed away the school emails and back to school supplies list, literally hiding them behind other papers on my desk. Then I felt angry at the school district for starting school so darn early. Don't they know it's still summer, too hot for kids to sit in un-air conditioned classrooms and too many fun things left on our family summer fun "to do" list? Don't they know I'm not ready to be the mother of a junior high student? I know that with that transition comes a smaller role in his life and a larger presence of others. I wanted to dig my heels in, slow time down, and direct my energy towards criticizing the school board's calendar decisions. Was this functional or helpful? No! It only made me crabby, sad, and resentful. It affected my emotional wellness and likely my physical health too. So I got to thinking about what approach would be consistent with my vision of wellness, and that was to FLOW with life's transitions.

When we flow we are aware of emotions and thoughts that arise, but we are not consumed by them. We approach the new situation with an air of curiosity to see what space has opened up in our life for something new. We are intentional about what we put into that space.

So how, exactly, does one flow with life's transitions? That's the million dollar question right? There are different types of transitions. Some are planned in advance or expected such as sending kids off to school at a certain age, switching careers, moving to a city you've always wanted to live in, etc. But sometimes life throws us curve balls and we are forced into a transition due to a sudden loss or change in situation. Transitions that come upon us

unexpectedly will likely require a stronger, more concerted effort to go with the flow since we haven't had time to at least mentally rehearse the transition. Being sensitive to that fact, here are some tips for going with the flow.

- 1. Identify your status quo response to transition. Do you fight, flee or flow?** Be honest with yourself when answering this question. Notice your patterns. Awareness is the first step.
- 2. Let the past go. Reflect on it, learn from it, but don't live in it.** I think Hermann Hesse said it best when he said, *"Some of us think holding on makes us strong, but sometimes it is letting go."* Power lives in the present moment.
- 3. Look for opportunities within the transition. What are you being called to explore or to take advantage of?** For example, now that the kids are back in school I have the opportunity to spend more time on Wellfinity and might actually get a newsletter published on time next month. ☺ Perhaps you lost your job and this is the time to actually go for it and pursue your passion. If you're becoming an empty nester maybe you reconnect with a hobby or social group that you have always wanted to do, but didn't have the time or energy to engage in with kids in the house. I realize that in cases of unexpected transition, especially one involving a loss of something or someone in your life, this step may be more of a challenge. If you're not ready for it, then skip it and come back to it. Sometimes there are silver linings in less than desirable situations.
- 4. ENGAGE IN GROUNDING PRACTICES THAT HELP YOU STAY IN THE PRESENT MOMENT AND/OR CONNECT YOU TO SOMETHING LARGER THAN YOUR CIRCUMSTANCE.** I capitalized this one on purpose because I think it is critical to coping with transition. We need something that stays steady throughout the ups and downs in our lives; that helps us see the transition from a bigger picture perspective. Some examples could be spiritual practices like prayer and devotion, yoga, tai chi, breath awareness, meditation, body scans, or volunteering to help someone else. Mindfulness practices are powerful. If you don't have experience and want to learn more about mindfulness I would highly encourage you to check out resources by John Kabat-Zin or enroll in a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course if one is available in your area (and as an FYI to people in the Iowa City, there is a course available at the University of Iowa). I know for me personally, prayer and meditation, especially one where I envision myself taking refuge in God, have been very comforting in times of transition.
- 5. Give yourself time to make big decisions.** Depending on the situation, transitions can be stressful, emotional times. Not necessarily the best conditions for making big decisions. It's easy to revert to what we did in the past or jump into something new too soon if we're not mindful. Ever jump into an exciting new relationship right after one ended? I myself fell into the habit of giving up one job only to get another that kept me in a similar position of being underpaid and unfulfilled, but all because it was "safe" and easier to do so. Staying in the present moment and being mindful help you realize that not all the thoughts and feelings that arise have to be acted upon.

6. **Create a vision of what you want your future to look like and align your choices during the transition with it.** This might seem contradictory since going with the flow is about the present moment. So why am I having you think of a future-oriented vision? Because when emotions run high during a transition, it's easy to follow a gut reaction that might not be the most adaptive response. I know for me this summer moving, having a husband traveling, and kids home about put me over the edge a few days. There was a period of time where I wondered if I should just give up on my own business and get a "regular" job. However, I'm glad I didn't go with that swell of emotion because it wouldn't have aligned with my vision of having a job that is flexible for my family's needs yet also allows me to really make a difference in some people's lives and direct my own career. If you pause and mindfully consider what choice or action will align with your vision, the power of the present moment and what you want to create in your life (i.e. your vision) unite.
7. **If changes need to take place following a transition, take it slowly.** Maybe you've been widowed and are worried about finances, or maybe you switched jobs but find you don't have all the training you need for the position. You don't have to sell everything or quit your job. Think of baby steps. In the case of the widow, consult a financial planner. In the case of the job, talk with your boss about additional training opportunities. Slowing things down by breaking big changes into smaller steps facilitates flowing through a transition.
8. **Enlist support.** Are you sick of seeing this on my list of tips yet? It's been a "frequent flier" in my newsletters and that's because support is so crucial to our wellness. When undergoing a transition it can help to talk to others who are going through a similar transition themselves to share feelings, ideas, and get encouragement. Similarly, transitions may tax your energy and having others who can help with day to day tasks like cooking, cleaning, child care, etc. so you can take care of yourself can be life savers. Or sometimes we just need support and accountability to weather a transition in ways that move us towards rather than away from our vision for our lives.

One certainty in life is that change and transitions will happen. The question then, is will you fight, flee, or flow with them?

Here to help you weather life's transitions and come out thriving! Feel free to contact me for a free initial consultation to find out how coaching can help you navigate a transition.

Shelly

Live with Intention, Love Yourself, Create Balance, Fulfill Your Purpose & Thrive!