

If at First You Don't Succeed, Maybe it's Best to Move On

THE 4 C'S OF TRANSITIONING INTO A NEW BEGINNING

By LeTosha White

There I was at the final session of a yearlong professional development program, which surprisingly, and very pleasantly, turned out to be the most atypical professional development that I had ever attended. As an administrator for more than 14 years, I had experienced quite a few of them and was therefore extremely conversant on the good and bad of professional development. This professional development, however, seemed more of a retreat for early childhood administrators desperately in need of refuge from the tumultuous world of accountability.

We were graciously welcomed and mentored by some of the greatest minds in early childhood education. They understood the complexity of being leaders in this field and honored our contributions to it. It was truly an amazing educational and spiritual experience that empowered the cohort of leaders to become reflective practitioners who implemented shared and data-driven decision-making practices within their professional communities. This ultimately resulted in happier staff and improved programming.

I digress. So there I was, on that last day, listening to other members of the group express gratitude to our mentors for a year of both professional and personal growth. One by one, they proclaimed a renewed commitment to their respective functions within their agencies. It was quite moving to watch such passion and appreciation. When it was my turn to speak I stood slowly, looked directly at the teary-eyed bunch and said in the clearest most confident voice I'd ever uttered, "This PD has changed my life. After much thought, I have decided that I'm ready to move on to another career. Thank you all for assisting me with making this decision." The room fell silent.

My colleagues didn't know that I had been looking over the precipice of my career for quite some time. Before that year, I did not even realize this fact. I loved working with families and I adored my staff. For 14 years, it was all that I knew (and I knew a lot about what I knew). I was definitely a creature of habit and my upbringing was deeply rooted in traditional values such as hard work, dedication, and persistence. Being a director was my identity, and I felt an overwhelming obligation to identify with my identity.

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Except it was getting harder to do so. Somewhere, I began to wonder if there was something else I should be doing with my life. I became increasingly fascinated with popular adages like, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, try again,” and “Winners never quit and quitters never win.” I found myself pondering, “Why should people keep trying at something if it’s just not for them?” and “If nobody ever quits anything, then how do new adventures ever begin?”

Certainly, I did not believe the goal of that leadership development program was to lose a director. (MAN OVERBOARD!) Nevertheless, within that brief year, I had been equipped with a serious professional arsenal. **In the process of learning how to become a reflective and intentional leader, I discovered the 4 C's** which helped me to determine that it was time for me to do away with the old and step into a new season of my life. These 4 C's are particularly useful during the decision-making process and will help you navigate through transitions of any kind—no matter how big or small. Are you ready? Let's go!

1. **CHALLENGE yourself to put on your “thinker’s cap.”** Whenever a decision has to be made, it is imperative that objectivity remains at the forefront. Do not discount your feelings, but understand that decisions that are solely based on emotions can be more risky than those derived from logic. It is important to establish a clear distinction between fact and feeling in order to prioritize and strategize. Being objective helps to assemble verifiable information necessary to make informed decisions.
2. **Make a CHOICE.** After you have empirically identified the dynamics, it is time to weigh the pros against the cons and select your next step. Either you will continue your existence in the same manner that you have been, or you will sever ties with your current condition and move on to the next phase of your life. Do not sit on the fence. Trust your decision. If you began with Step 1, you did not come to it haphazardly.
3. **Take a CHANCE.** Activate the decision you have reached. Be brave and engage in an activity that solidifies the resolution you made in Step 2. What this looks like in action will depend on individual situations. For instance, if you have chosen to move forward with a new career as I did, updating your resume and leveraging your network for employment possibilities would be the perfect progression for you. If you have decided to make a program improvement or modification, then pulling together a team to lead this initiative might be the next action step. Remember, this is an external action step so you must involve others who will participate in the effort.
4. **CHANGE.** Immerse yourself in the process of becoming different. Read. Research. Pursue and practice the qualities necessary to make your endeavor a success. Abandon resistance and regression; they impede evolution. When you fully embrace transformation, you accelerate the process of becoming what it is that you need to be to get to where you are trying to go.

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Using the 4 C's to guide my decision-making process kicked off a series of events that impacted my life in unimaginable ways. It changed the trajectory of my career path and supported my goal to implement deliberate tactics for better outcomes. **This formula will work for any change—either professional or personal—in your life.** While persistence and dedication are admirable and sometimes necessary attributes to have, so are ingenuity and adaptability. The next time you find yourself at a crossroad, remember the 4 C's. They can help you steer clear of emotion-based influences that inhibit objectivity, ensure that you have confidence in whatever decision you reach, motivate you to set a plan in motion, and encourage you to bravely take on the modifications that are crucial to your success. Here's to your new beginning!

LeTosha holds a master's degree in Educational Leadership. Prior to working at the McCormick Center, LeTosha worked as director of an early childhood and after school program, and as an education consultant. She is currently a MTP Coach with Teachstone.

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