**Taking A Step Back is the First Step Forward**

*We all need space and reflection. Like ocean waves, we must retreat first before we can build more strength in what we are doing. This reveals itself in almost all areas of life: work, love, friendship, fitness, flexibility, connection, creativity. Trust this natural cycle.* - Victoria Erickson

A few years ago, I was sitting in a meeting with my business partners. We were talking about plans for the upcoming year and how we were going to achieve our goals. We started having a heated discussion about the way we would execute one of our strategic priorities when one of my partners stopped the conversation and said, “Wait guys, let’s take a step back; what are we actually trying to achieve?” It was a great question and one that he often asked.

And it’s not just a great question for achieving business goals. If we apply this question to every area of life, it will give us a much better chance to be happy, successful and fulfilled.

So many of us are so busy running on the treadmill of life, putting one foot in front of the other, achieving goals, ticking things off the list, following the path in front of us and totally immersed in our lives. We forget to stop and consider if where we are is really where we want to be; if what we are doing is really what we should be doing; if the path we are on is the one we want for our lives, our businesses, our relationships.

I work with a lot of clients who are in periods of transition, at a personal or professional crossroads in their lives. They are stuck. Confused about a big life, career or relationship decision. They’re wondering what they’re doing with their lives. They might be bored or unhappy. Lost or confused. Overwhelmed and stressed.

So, the first thing I ask everyone is to take a step back. Take a step back from working out “how” they are going to “do” something and think about *what they are trying to achieve*.

Yes, your first step forward in most any situation, should be to *take a step back.*

Whenever you find yourself trying to make a big decision, move forward with some area of your life, overcome a challenge or obstacle, or just feel like things aren’t where you want them to be, it’s important to take a step back, look at the big picture and identify what you really want*before* you move forward.

When you step back from your life, your career, your path and look from a bit of a distance, you see things from a different perspective.

Imagine you are lost in the woods. You could keep moving forward looking for your way out. You could panic and go in circles. You could, like I learned in camp, just sit still until someone comes for you.

Imagine instead that you could stop, take a deep breath and zoom out from your situation. Imagine you could fly above it all as if you were in a helicopter. Imagine you could look down at yourself amongst the trees. What could you see or notice differently from this perspective? A different route? People there to support you? Where you really want to go? This is exactly what you need to do before you jump into your next endeavor.

**Here are 3 questions to ask when you take that step back:**

1. **Where am I now?**

This is the perspective piece. As you look down on your life, what do you notice? *What brought you here to this point? What is missing? What are you feeling? What do you want more or less of? What is important to you, right now, at this stage in your life and career? What are you really trying to achieve here?*
2. **What do I want?**

Having a clear goal, vision, intention, dream, ambition or desire is essential. Think about what you *want* at this next stage, in this next phase, in the current circumstance of your life. What’s the goal or outcome?

Frankly, if you don’t know what you want, how do you expect to get it? If you don’t’ know where you’re going, how do you expect to get there?

You might have heard the famous Lewis Carroll quote, “*If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.*”

However, asking yourself what you want or what you’re trying to achieve is sometimes easier said than done.

When I ask clients what they want, we run into quite a few challenges. Here are a few to watch out for.

Many clients know what they *don’t* want but aren’t as clear on what they *do* want. You need to be clear on what you want before you can effectively move forward.

Some clients have gotten into the habit of making decisions based on what’s best for their career, family or others, and have forgotten to assess their own needs and desires.

Others know somewhat what they want, but it’s not nearly specific enough for them to go out and get it. Saying “I want a new job” is really different than saying, “I want a part-time job where I can be surrounded by like-minded people in sports entertainment.”

1. **Why do I want that?**

Understanding your drive and motivation behind that goal – your ”why” – is just as important as the “what.” Often people don’t know they’re doing what they’re doing – or they did at some point, but lost their way. Connecting to your deeper why will be the fuel that keeps you going, especially when times get tough and roadblocks appear. Ask yourself, “*Why* is this important to me?”

**Meet Sabine**

When I first started working with Sabine\*, we took a step back and I asked her what she wanted. She told me she wanted to “take her business to the next level.” This was important to her because she wanted to be able to financially support her family. But, as we dug deeper, she realized there was so much more. She ultimately found that what she really wanted was to feel like herself again; to feel secure, trust and assert herself, and regain her sense of self. This was important for everything she was going to take on as she moved forward with her life. She needed to get centered first.

The important point here is that when you are thinking about what you want, don’t stop at the first answer that bubbles up. Ask yourself, “What else? Anything else?” And see what else comes up for you.

When you take a step back, you might realize that while you thought you wanted to continue the same career trajectory, you actually want a change. Or that what everyone is telling you to do – or that you’re good at – is not what you want to do. Perhaps you’ll discover that what IS most important to you right now is supporting your family and while your dream job is on the horizon, it’s not what’s next on the menu.

**Remember, we are designed to fulfill our intentions, but first we must know what they are.**

So next time you find yourself at a crossroads or point of transition, looking at what to do next, making a major life or relationship decision or big career move, make sure you take time to pause, hop off the treadmill of life and take that very important first step back. Look at the big picture, get perspective and identify *where* you want to go first. Then, you can make your plans, create your strategy and take the next steps!

*Here’s the thing. People who get what they want tend to be the people who know what they want. –Martha Beck*

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\*Name changed