



Head For New Endeavors

Be a student of your own experience.

By Dennis Coyne

For months, I had planned my exit. I was fond of my law firm, valued my clients and enjoyed my law practice. But I wanted to do more than practice law; I also wanted to coach lawyers and consult with law firms. With the blessing of my firm — and with some trepidation — I decided to move my law practice across the street to begin work as a coach and consultant. Would this move prove whimsical or sure-footed? Only time would tell.

As my exit day drew close, an e-mail drifted across my computer screen from the law firm administrator advising everyone that I was leaving for "new endeavors." News of other departures was invariably announced this way: those leaving the firm were pursuing new endeavors. It was comforting to think that we were all following the same blueprint. I wondered if all of us would one day meet in a sunny place called New Endeavors, a community like the nearby communities of Golden Valley, New Hope, and Young America. Perhaps we'd be welcomed at a clubhouse, a place for us to celebrate our successes. On the other hand, New Endeavors might be a derelict town, occupied by has-beens whose dreams had long been forgotten. Either way, I'd find out soon enough.

At the close of the last day at my law firm, I crossed the street to my new office wondering who I'd be if not a shareholder in a major firm. Perhaps I'd just disappear from view and be gone forever.

Happily, I reached the opposite curb that afternoon, and I've thrived in my new endeavors. Along the way, I've learned some valuable lessons. No doubt that you'll learn a lot, too, as you pursue your new endeavors. As you go, answering the following three questions might be helpful. They were for me.

Who Are My Champions And How Can They Help Me?

Each of us has people who know us well, support us and believe in us. These people are our champions. As I made my transition, I called my champions together for an evening of conversation and brainstorming. I asked them to identify what I did well, and to suggest how I could use my natural gifts to succeed in my new endeavor. I also asked them to let me know if I had a fatal flaw, some quality that could derail my plans and cause me to fail; and to identify opportunities for me that I could use as I entered a new marketplace.

Soon, the walls of the room were covered with paper, ideas and suggestions. After a couple of hours, I had the beginning of a blueprint for success. That evening, my champions served as a virtual Board of Directors, guiding me in my new venture. Since then, I've met individually with each of them, continuing to ask for their advice and feedback. I suggest that you identify your champions and invite them to be your virtual Board of Directors. You'll be glad that you did.

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As I Pursue My New Endeavor, What Is My Offer?

As you transition, people will ask you why you've done so, and you'll want to be prepared to answer them. An answer couched in complaints about the place you've just left will not capture their interest, nor will it reflect well on you. More likely, your whining will turn people off.

As an alternative, focus on what you hope to accomplish in your new endeavor. Put another way, what will you be able to do for people in your new role? What can you offer them?

When I transitioned to coaching and consulting, people encouraged me to prepare an elevator speech — a few lines I could use to introduce myself to a stranger in an elevator. I didn't disagree with the utility of such a speech; I just didn't know how to explain what I had to offer as a coach, and I certainly didn't know how to do so briefly.

Fortunately, I figured this out during a workshop during which I had introduced myself as an attorney and career coach. At a coffee break, a lawyer approached me and, jabbing his index finger into my chest, demanded to know what I did.

Without thinking about it, I replied, "I ride shotgun!" Startled, he withdrew his finger and asked me to explain. "I am familiar with transitions," I explained. "I've studied the topic and I've lived it myself. When people approach me and ask me for assistance, it's as though they're riding on a dusty wagon, drawn by a couple horses, moving through an unfamiliar territory. Spotting me, they ask if I can help them find their way to where they want to go. I reply that I can, and offer to ride shotgun. Sitting beside them, I guide them, helping them to avoid pitfalls and ambush. But the client continues to hold the reins and set the course. After all, it is the client's journey, not mine."

In that moment, my elevator speech crystallized: "I ride shotgun." As you develop a short answer to the inevitable question about your new endeavors, experiment with different responses. Pay attention to what you say spontaneously; your reply may be spot-on.

What Are My New Conditions Of Success?

As you exit from one scene and enter another, identify your conditions of success. Decide how you will measure success. Be specific. If the metric is financial, what income do you need to generate, and by what date? If you are seeking to develop new skills, what skills do you want to develop, and how will you know you've done so? If you are seeking more work-life balance, what is your strategy to achieve this and how will you know when you have?

Write down your definitions, conditions and timetables. Ask a friend, mentor or coach to hold you accountable to your projections: schedule a time to meet when you can report on your progress. Adapt and re-tool as you go. Be a student of your own experience. Your conditions of success will likely change as you change and as your once-new endeavor matures over time.

As you move forward in a new career, I hope that you will align your gifts and values with what you choose to do. Your champions can help you with this. As you become clear about who you are, you will learn how to describe your offer and what you can do for people. Finally, as you become clear about your conditions of success, you'll have objectives to guide you along the way.

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The poet and author David Whyte has often inspired me. "Once we have built our work and our contribution around our natural gifts," he writes in *Crossing the Unknown Sea*, "we have joined a great gravitational river where the current is flowing in the direction we wish to travel." May this be true for you.



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