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Job Transition: Why the First Few Months Are Critical

Congratulations! After great effort and focused energy, you've finally landed a fabulous new position—one that is sure to advance your career and meet your work and personal goals in a way your old position never could.

But don't stop there. Getting hired is just the first step.

You'll need to spend as much effort and energy—and maybe more—preparing for and making the transition. And this is where it really counts, for the first three to six months in any new position is a period of extreme vulnerability.

"It's the highest-risk period, and the higher up you are, the riskier it is," says Jeff Gunderson, CEO of Executive Connections, an executive search and placement firm.

During this transitional period, everyone in your new company—boss, direct-reports, other employees—and even suppliers and customers are all forming initial impressions that will shape their expectations and actions. This dynamic is exacerbated when people in your new company expect you to bring about change within the organization.

This transitional period might even be riskier today than seven or eight years ago. Shrunken budgets have meant less training, reduced staff support, increased workloads and, perhaps most of all, increased expectations for newly hired managers and executives. Should you end up leaving after a short stint, doing so can leave a black mark on your resume, raising questions for future employers about your judgment and ability to assess opportunities before making a career commitment.

"Leaders, regardless of their level, are most vulnerable in their first few months in a new position because they lack detailed knowledge of the challenges they will face and what it will take to succeed in meeting them," writes

Michael Watkins, author of *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels*.

So what can you do to assure that your transition is smooth and productive? Here are a few suggestions:

- **Ask** your new company if it will commit to transition support by hiring a coach to work with you. Be bold in your request; you may even choose to make it a point of negotiation. If possible, look to your search firm for coaching support. Gunderson says his company feels so strongly about the need for transition support that it includes six months of it in all its search placements.
- **Use** the period before you actually start at your new position to learn as much as you can about the company, its vision, its strategies and the industry.
- **Examine** the challenges and opportunities of the company, and identify the barriers to success.
- **Talk** to people at the new company. What is the culture, and what are the processes? What kind of a team will you have to work with, and on whom will you be able to depend?
- **Assess** your own strengths and weaknesses, and identify personal vulnerabilities that could come into play in your new position.

"Failure to create momentum during the first few months virtually guarantees an uphill battle for the rest of your tenure in the job," Watkins writes. "Building credibility and securing some early wins lay a firm foundation for longer-term success." ●

Top 10 Questions to Ask Before Becoming a Leader

- 1. How well do I know myself?** The most effective leaders are in touch with who they are and how they feel—especially during the important transition time into a new position.
- 2. How flexible am I?** Moving into a leadership role can be a huge stretch...how can you avoid "pulling" something?
- 3. How do I handle failure?** Good leaders fail frequently. Rather than viewing failure as shameful and negative, it's best to see it as a valuable learning tool.
- 4. Do I have a victim mentality?** True leaders look not to blame staff or bosses for any given situation but to take responsibility.
- 5. How's my work/life balance?** Being out of balance in either direction makes for less potent leading.

- 6. What do I model?** Your actions will be seen by those you lead as "what it takes to be successful."
- 7. How committed am I to learning?** Leaders are always striving to learn, grow and improve.
- 8. How much of a pleaser am I?** Leaders have to make tough decisions. This can be difficult if you're the type that wants to make everyone happy all the time.
- 9. How confident am I?** Confident leaders don't have to micromanage, and they inspire others to have confidence in themselves.
- 10. Why am I interested in being a leader?** Consider "interviewing" people who are currently leaders in your company/field about what they like and don't about their leadership role. You may hear things you hadn't considered. ●

Self-Quiz

How Well Do You Manage Your Energy?

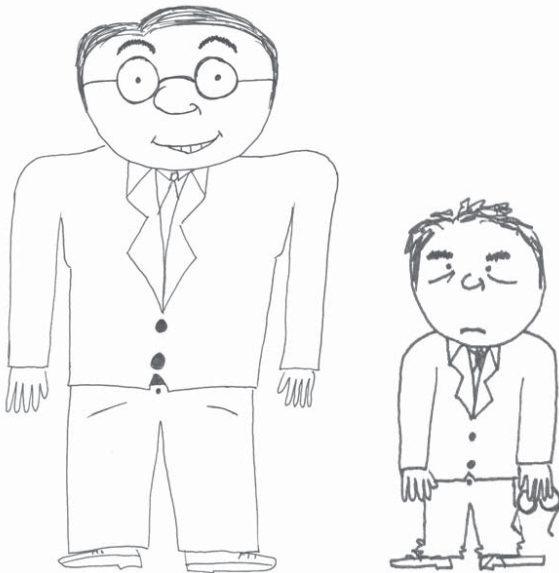
When the seemingly relentless demands at work and burdens of a busy life take their toll on work performance, we tend to think that managing our time better will improve the situation. If I can just work faster, multitask more efficiently, things will be better, we think.

However, as Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, authors of *The Power of Full Engagement*, explain, it is the skillful management of energy, not time, that most significantly affects high performance. Too often, we squander this valuable resource through energy-taxing habits—physical, emotional, mental and spiritual habits. Take this Self-Quiz to see how well you are managing your energy.

True False

- 1. I rely on sugary or carbohydrate-rich snacks for bursts of energy when I need an energetic pick-me-up.
- 2. Life is an endless marathon to be endured; you just have to keep on running.
- 3. I tend to do what feels immediately pressing and easier to accomplish rather than make intentional choices about how I spend my time and what matters most.
- 4. I hate routines; they're too much like being stuck in a rut. I prefer to be loose and spontaneous.
- 5. I'm so busy I rarely have time to reflect on what I value most deeply.
- 6. I seem to be stuck in overdrive; I feel like I've lost the ability to shift to any other gear.
- 7. I work out (cardiovascular and weight training) irregularly, if at all.
- 8. I regularly get less than six hours of sleep.
- 9. I rarely take breaks; that way, I can get more done.
- 10. When I take the time to notice, my breathing seems shallow; I seem to go a long time without taking a deep breath.
- 11. Anxiety, frustration and overwhelm seem always present for me.
- 12. When I'm under pressure, I easily become harsh or defensive with others.
- 13. Personal relationships are not something I devote a lot of energy to. If they don't work, I move on.
- 14. I smoke and/or drink; to be honest, doing so really helps lower my anxiety level.
- 15. It's been a long time since I've done something purely because it was enjoyable or felt good.
- 16. Downtime is wasted time.

If you answered "true" to more than just a few of these statements, you're probably not performing—or feeling—as well as you could be. If you would like to explore how to live in a way that enhances, rather than depletes, your energy, don't hesitate to call. ●



Are you being your biggest self? What keeps you small?

Marshall Brown & Associates Mission Statement

Marshall Brown & Associates' mission is to assist individuals by empowering and educating them to create and lead more fulfilling lives. Through coaching, we support and encourage our clients to find their passions and unique talents, while seeking additional possibilities to move from mediocre to exceptional, both in their personal and professional lives.

We help our clients realize their potential, get unstuck and make things happen!

Marshall Brown & Associates empowers individuals to succeed!

“Flaming enthusiasm, backed by horse sense and persistence, is the quality that most frequently makes for success.”

—Dale Carnegie

The Brand Called You

The idea of a “personal brand” is something we all understand...at least as it relates to celebrities. Figures such as Madonna, Tom Cruise and Lance Armstrong craft and maintain their brands as enthusiastically as the Coca Colas and the Nikes of the corporate world.

But a personal brand for you and me? Absolutely, says personal branding guru Peter Montoya. The issue, in fact, isn't whether to create a personal brand, but how to create the most effective one you can, he says.

“Everyone has a personal brand, whether they like it or not,” says Montoya, author of *The Brand Called You* and *The Personal Branding Phenomenon*. The goal must be to craft that brand so that it creates a clear and memorable impression about who you are and what you do—whether you are a small business owner, a solo entrepreneur or a corporate executive.

A personal brand is “the powerful, clear, positive idea that comes to mind whenever other people think of you,” Montoya explains. It's the values, abilities and actions you stand for, or, as he puts it, your personal brand is “who you are, what you do, and what makes you different or how you create value for your target market.”

In that sense a personal brand is a little broader than a corporate brand, but it's not just a synonym for professional marketing. In fact, most personal branding experts say the process of developing a personal brand turns the typical marketing process on its head. Instead of starting with segmenting, targeting, product, price, etc., you start with...you. You define who you are, what is truly important to you and what makes you unique—and then you build your brand around that core set of values. In marketing lingo, you uncover your “unique promise of value.” From there, you identify exactly what segment of the market you want to serve and how best to do it.

Effective branding often means targeting a smaller, better defined market with a much more focused message, says William Arruda, head of the personal branding consultancy Reach. “Although it seems counterintuitive, the smaller you make your target market, the greater your chances of success.”

For those in the corporate world, personal branding is a natural part of the job-hunting process—particularly for someone mapping out a long-term career trajectory. According to Arruda, it can also make sense to tend to your personal brand within your corporate environment, though the territory gets a little tricky when he describes your co-workers as your “competition.”

“Many executives feel they need to conform to business norms when they go to work, but this prevents building a brand,” Arruda wrote in a recent *Career Journal* article for the *Wall Street Journal*. “In the new world of work, those who stand out succeed, so put your brand on everything you do. Whether you're making a presentation, in a meeting or writing a report, don't leave your brand at home. Ask yourself how you can connect your brand to every situation.”

No matter where you're building your personal brand, a critical component of communicating it is likely to happen on the Internet. Although the importance of branding has been known for decades in the large corporate arena, where billions of dollars get spent each year in “brand building” campaigns, it is the Web that has driven the surge of interest in branding at the personal level. It eliminates many traditional barriers to commerce while reinforcing the word-of-mouth value of that special something that makes each business—each person—unique, i.e., its brand.

This idea of the Web driving a new age of personal branding may have been expressed first by management guru Tom Peters in an article in *Fast Company* magazine in 1997. Everyone needs to be “the CEO of Me, Inc.,”

he argued. In Peters' words, “branding means nothing more (and nothing less) than creating a distinct personality...and telling the world about it.”

Websites create the potential for your brand to have unprecedented reach. The branding communicated through your website will help drive your word-of-mouth campaign, and consistent branding will help get your emails opened, read and acted upon. Meanwhile blogs have become the Web tool du jour for personal branding among certain segments—particularly writers and technical professionals.

Arruda lists three tips for making the most of your personal brand to build your business, or to enhance or reinforce your value within your corporation:

- Make sure that everything that surrounds your brand (your office, Web site, customer service organization, etc.) communicates the same brand message.
- Build and nurture your professional network; ensure that all members understand your brand message.
- Establish appropriate partnerships to extend your brand and gain complementary brand value.

A personal brand won't necessarily turn you into the next Tiger Woods—in fact, it probably won't do a thing for your golf game—but it may be a valuable tool to define and refine what you do and how you tell your customers or your employers about it. ●



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“Marshall Brown is an asset to any executive. He listens well and gives on-target guidance to give you direction and keep you motivated. His dedication, professionalism, knowledge and encouragement are a constant source of positive reinforcement to keep you focused on your objective—whether it be a job search, career advancement or a career change. I wouldn't make a move without consulting Marshall first!”

—Karin M. Soyster, CMP,
CAE, Vice President,
Membership Services,
American Bakers Association

“I decided to make a career change after working with a company for 22 years. Because of my tenure and valuable contribution to the organization, I was able to receive job counseling. This is when I met Mr. Marshall Brown. He was very professional. The information he provided guided me into my next career venture. I was a little afraid and apprehensive in making such a change after 22 years, but Mr. Brown gave me the confidence and reassurance I needed. Marshall was such a vital part of my transition period. I highly recommend Mr. Marshall Brown's service of expertise.”

—Yvonne Lewis,
National Council for
Interior Design Qualification



Generating Brilliant Ideas

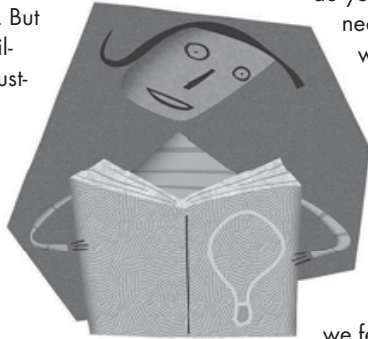
If you're alive, you have new ideas at work every day: what would make this process more efficient, how to motivate your key players better, how to win that contract you're after, etc. But how do you generate brilliant ideas, those blockbusters with the potential to change people, businesses—even destinies?

Consider some of the following ways to go from everyday ideas to brilliance:

- **Listen and observe.**

Notice what others are doing and saying. Engage your whole self—your physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual self—in viewing your world and the world at large.

- **Create the spark.** Don't just wait for great ideas to cross your path...do something to stimulate the creative juices. Travel. Read as much and as widely as you can. Make it a habit to meet and talk to new people every



day. Or get even more intentional and start a brainstorming group.

- **Look for problems.** What difficulties do you encounter on a daily basis that need a different solution? Too often we get inured to problems. We metaphorically walk around the heap of laundry in the middle of the room rather than put it into a laundry basket, or better yet wash it. Give yourself full permission to get negative. What bugs you?

- **Welcome change.** When we fear change, we find ourselves stuck in the most deadening of ruts. Nothing new comes from this place, much less chart-busting ideas.

- **Don't assume.** Check out your unconscious thoughts. Do you believe that something is no good if it's not already being done or hasn't been created? Or the opposite: Do you say, "That book's already been written," instead of "How can I add my unique perspective to this body of knowledge?"

- **Indulge your interests.** What are you passionate about? Making time to do what you love not only keeps you enthusiastic about life, but also becomes the source of wonderful ideas that can take you in directions you'd only dreamed of in the past.

- **Ask for feedback.** Don't isolate yourself, worrying that someone will steal your idea. What would the world have missed if Luciano Pavarotti or Johnny Cash had sung only in the confines of their own living room?

- **Be flexible.** Sometimes a fabulous idea doesn't always reveal itself immediately. Or it may first come in disguise. Flexibility will allow the idea to morph to its full potential.

- **Cultivate curiosity.** Play games with yourself to wake up your curiosity. Why is that building painted green? What do people your age on the opposite coast like to do on Saturday afternoons? Curiosity didn't kill the cat; it gave him his nine lives.

And finally, be sure to keep an idea notebook with you at all times. You never know when you might need to capture that million-dollar idea in all its glory. ●

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self-assessment:**

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"The very essence of leadership is that you have to have vision. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet."

—Theodore M. Hesburgh