

Career Change versus Continuity

Dr. Kathryn Kondrotas (August 2013)

Making a career change is a lot like divorce; no matter what, there is loss involved. No one and nothing is all good or all bad. That is what makes life what it is: complicated. I have been going through a career change from academic research psychologist to writer for most of my professional years. I have vacillated and tried to "get back with" my old career many times and it has tried to "get back with me". I have called it retirement but it is more realistically a career change into finally writing that book from the vantage point of a whistle blower.

I made the decision to change careers at various stages. I realized I had never really left my career as a writer; I only took a detour into academics to gain some credentials. I am now in the process of going back to where I started out. I was just looking for an important topic from the social sciences on which I could write. Thus, my career has always been as a writer. I just needed to do some research before I put pen to paper.

It occurred to me that it might behoove all of us who are making career changes to see things this way. For example, the marketing psychologist who leaves business to teach at a university might wish to position herself as now "after years of research" having something from the real world to teach. This is not making up lies; it is the truth of continuity in our lives. For myself, I have not lost my academic career, I have finally entered the writing phase after years of backbreaking research.

When I analyze the decisions I have made along the way leading up to this transition I can see the common thread of an emerging writer. For example, whereas my more practical academic colleagues have chosen to practice silence instead of ratting on the profession, I refused to be silenced knowing full well I would soon be heading out the door to write a book. When compromise adds up to where you cannot take it anymore, you realize that different career paths have different tolerance levels. Without these differences, the professions would never evolve and society would stagnate.

Looking for, or reminding yourself of, the continuity you are following when you make a career change can help to deepen the experience and avoid "the unbearable lightness of being," the title of Milan Kundera's book about when he, a doctor, was forced to work as a house-painter upon his immigration to the U.S. from Eastern Europe. Remembering that all along we were always a writer or a teacher and that is why we made the decisions we did can help to ease the sense of loss. We did not lose; we won on the other side of things.