

## Stepping Back to Move Forward

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*A specific take on career evolution and personal development from Anna Shakhovets, a senior manager at a global brewing company*

### **Personal reflection on an atypical approach to Career Transition**

Personally, I have seen a lot of tools on how to plan a career transition. Many articles speak of working with in-house employer resources or finding a mentor to plan further personal and career development. Depending on where you are in your career and what your momentary professional needs are, sometimes this works, sometimes it doesn't. However, my particular situation led me to focus more on how I could remove myself from the day-to-day of business and concentrate my thoughts on what I wanted to achieve in the next phase of my career. Hopefully, I'm not alone in my initial feeling that I didn't have a clear transition path for my evolution in my professional life. I wasn't sure how I, taking a non-corporate route, could guide myself to the next level in my job.

I started in a situation where I had been with my company for over five years. I was an ambitious, conscientious employee and had received good high performer ratings and assessments of my work performance. Yet I wasn't really sure how to advance in my career. Internally, we had a lot of restructuring over the past 18 months, so I just couldn't find a logical next step for my personal advancement in that particular environment. Given this situation, I decided that what I needed most was clarity. I needed to step outside the professional structures that I had been a part of for so many years and clear my head.

That's when I got the idea to use my paid leave to take time away from my company and travel to Asia. I needed a different sort of energy and motivation, and I needed to find different sources of inspiration. So

having made up my mind to embark on this journey, I started to prepare for my leave well in advance. I took one year to set up my "sabbatical". I had 60 days of leave accrued and I planned to use it to make myself a happier person and, in turn, a better colleague and business professional. I spent these 2 months between Bali, Thailand and Malaysia practicing yoga, trying different meditation techniques, working with Tai Chi Masters, putting my body going through 8 days of fasting and meeting teachers from different disciplines. I was learning; I was practicing; I was reflecting.

Contrary to what you might expect, I didn't return from my stay in Asia in a full state of professional nirvana: I didn't even have any career epiphanies while I was away. However, I did find the calm and clarity I was seeking AND I became more patient with my expectations and more aware of what my career transition should be. Just as an aside: I gained so much physical and mental energy from my travels, I almost became too overwhelmingly positive for my colleagues. Upon my return, the most common words I would hear in my office were "Calm down: you have too much energy."

Going back to the ideas of patience and transition, I realized that not finding an immediate, logical "next step" in my search for career opportunities was not a bad thing. Failure to discover immediately a new job or position was not tantamount to stagnation. Instead, I knew I could evolve and develop more by focusing on my own personal development. I could look for new ways to make myself a better, more inspiring, more efficient person: a better manager and business colleague. Now I knew how.

One of my main realizations was that you can both look for and wait for new professional opportunities at the same time. Additionally, I discovered that transition is also an internal (spiritual) as well as external (material) process. I no longer experience the frustration I felt before. I don't want to pursue change for change's sake. I know that I need to do something meaningful in the next phase of my career,

and I've begun to make assessments of my professional not wants alongside my wants.

Essentially, I've found confidence in waiting. I now know that waiting does not equal resignation or being passive. It is about having trust and enough internal resources to be able to recognize the right opportunity at the right time. I've also discovered that spiritual development of corporate and organizational talent is just as important as any other soft skills training employees might receive. This is something I find to be highly undervalued in most corporate environments. You can find some good examples at Google or Inner Experiment at Genentech (<https://vimeo.com/21063653>); however, these tend to be exceptions, rather than the industry rule. Personal qualities such as mindfulness and activities such as meditation and developing concentration or the ability to cope with stress can offer just as much value as, if not more than, courses in "how to make the right sales pitch". The most interesting thing is that this value can be quantified: analyses done by Genentech have shown it.

I think the most important lesson I've learned is that stepping out of your situation (letting it go) helps to get more clarity. I met a lot of inspirational people who helped and taught me in many different ways: mindfulness teachers, monks, detox & fasting experts, yogis and other travellers. All the knowledge they shared with me helped me shape my transition, create my own toolbox and design my ideal job. I also clearly identified my strengths and got a lot of positive feedback from people on my ability to drive them through change and help them gain focus and clarity. When I came back, I wanted to start sharing my findings with others: people who probably don't have the possibility to be away from their jobs for 2 months.

Supported by my previous coaching education and 10+ years of experience in corporate environments, I am currently involved in a couple of volunteer projects that look to help business professionals use mindfulness activities and meditation techniques in the workplace. I also took up

1-2-1 coaching again. Today, my aspiration would be to run and develop a program similar to the one led by Inner Experiment: not just an afternoon workshop but a lasting program that allows these tools and ways of thinking to become part of a company's/team's DNA. I would like to take my turn sharing what I have learned, and I humbly hope that it may help people to become less stressed and more focused. Ultimately, I hope it will help companies create better work environments and become more successful as businesses and more attractive as employers.

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