

Writing A Way Through: How to Harness the Power of Journaling during Work-Life Transitions

By

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As career professionals we often meet with individuals during a time when they feel that their lives have been turned upside down. In today's economy more people are experiencing major changes in work and life. This includes individuals who never before doubted the possibility of easily finding their next position. How can we support our clients when they are overwhelmed by uncertainty and feelings of powerlessness?

In this article, I describe how journaling techniques can help.

Journaling: A Personal Journey

My earliest interest in applying journaling to career and work life issues derived from my own experience. Newly relocated to the United States, I was determined to finally focus on writing up my doctoral research. Since I was the accompanying partner in this international assignment, I arrived without a job to go to.

I looked forward to the luxury of time to focus on my writing. No more excuses delaying my progress.

I had gained time, but soon discovered I had lost more than I anticipated. I no longer had the day-to-day support of my professional peers

Secretly I worried that I had made a big mistake. My research adviser was now thousands of miles away. Staying focused was more of a struggle than I had imagined.

It was then I began to journal on a regular basis. Inspired by Julia Cameron's book, *The Artist's Way*, I sat down with my spiral notebook each day for a timed writing session before beginning work. My journaling practice helped me get unstuck.

I wrote about the ups and downs of adjusting to a new culture. I wrote on days I felt lonely and isolated, and when I worried if my daughter would be happy in her new school. I wrote about the process of writing up my research and what I might do when I finished. I did the writing.

A daily ritual of 15 minutes of journaling gave me the jumpstart I needed. I began to make progress toward my submission date.

So how can journaling be applied to careers?

Real-world Applications

As a career professional, you witness the clients' struggles with career communication. Yet to succeed they need to clearly communicate how they can solve problems that prospective employers care about. How can journaling help candidates understand themselves and the needs of employers?

Increase Insight with a Character Sketch

The “**character sketch**” is a journaling technique to do just that. Just as a fiction author describes story characters in detail as a way of getting to know them better, your clients can write a character sketch related to their job search.

For example, writing a detailed description of prospective employers is a powerful way of increasing insight into their perspective. This imaginative exercise enriches information gathered through research. Insight into the employers’ perspective enables the job-seeker to connect what they have to offer with what an employer wants.

During later phases of the job search, this technique may help with interview preparation. For example, clients may get a clearer picture of their strengths by writing a description of themselves, as seen through the eyes of the interviewer or potential coworkers.

Imagine a Future Self

The same approach can help a client who is changing careers. Journaling can be used to bridge the gap between a former professional identity that is no longer relevant, and the new identity that is still being constructed.

By taking an imaginative leap through writing, the client actively engages with their new identity, even when it may not yet feel real. This can also strengthen their ability to communicate more persuasively in the context of limited experience that is directly relevant.

Some clients may need additional stepping-stones. If an individual has difficulty

imagining a future self, a character sketch of someone they know already in their desired position may be a good place to start.

As career professionals we offer expertise and guide clients through a maze of information. Journaling provides new tools to support clients to harness their creativity and tap into the inner resources that are so essential when familiar worlds feel far away.

About the Author

Jennifer Bradley, Ph.D. helps professionals navigate career and work life transitions with greater ease and less stress.

She is a Certified Coach (ICF), Registered Occupational Psychologist (UK), Journal to the Self™ instructor (Therapeutic Writing Institute, Denver, CO) and holds several career-industry certifications.



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