



MANAGING TRANSITION WITH CWC

There was a time when many of us who work in communications and media figured we held all the best marbles. We had jobs with almost weekly upward mobility, healthy (and steady) pay cheques, creative work environments, a culture that permitted free expression with impunity, enthusiastic if not downright eccentric work mates, and best of all ... a relaxed dress code before the concept ever slipped into the mainstream.

And then — gosh, it seemed like it happened overnight — everything that was once so solid and reliable is suddenly shifting. We no longer feel we hold the marbles; if anything, we feel we are losing them. We try to stand up and steady ourselves as the ship sways and lurches and steadies itself and then lurches again.

Worse, the shift is catapulting many of us out of our jobs, often just after we have received glowing performance appraisals. If we still have jobs, then those of us who survived the latest round of massive layoffs and restructuring — and this seems to happen almost every few months — are laden with guilt, disbelief and a loss of equilibrium. The added expectations and workload foisted on us seem more than we can bear. We feel like impostors because we continue to walk and talk as if everything is A-OK because to convey otherwise might cause others in our work circle to lose confidence in us and then we'd be next out the door for sure.

The workplace stresses also hit the home front: Spouses often face the same pressures at their workplace, and if there is no spouse, then you face the stress alone. There seems no rhyme or reason to work or to life. We look for some measure of stability in the world but we can't even find it in ourselves. Suddenly, we feel strange and out of sync. And when you feel odd or "other" you begin to question everything in your life. Gradually, you begin pulling away from the person you once were in order to embrace a new being, one who doesn't have to deal with nebulous concepts such as "ramping up," "scaling back," "convergence."

But the truth is, we are not impostors. We're probably doing just as good a job, if not better, than we ever were. But when our confidence is shaken, our trust is broken, it takes a long time to reset our sense of faith.

Out of such calamities is transition born. The ugly side of transition is that, more often than not, it is forced on us. No one likes that. This is where you find truth in the "attitude-is-everything" maxim. The pink slip (delivered by the executive who didn't have the brains to use a calculator until his business had gone so far south it needed immigration papers) can actually be a cosmic nudge in a good direction. It's hard to feel reassured by that when you have a family to support and bills to pay, but sometimes disappointment is really just opportunity having a bad hair day. What to do? Where to begin? Here's a few tips on your first steps:

1. Make a cup of tea. Sit down and let it all sink in slowly and clearly.
2. Cry a while because a job loss is still a loss, and you grieve losses. But remember, what you lost was a job, it wasn't your child, or your dog, or your best pair of sunglasses.

3. That said, remember that we put far more stock into jobs than we ought to. People define us by our jobs, and when we lose our job it can feel like we no longer exist. The people we once worked with, the people we thought were our friends and colleagues, may suddenly evaporate. No matter. What you will gain is a whole new set of allies who know what you're going through. And they'll define you by who you are, not what you are, or were.

If you have been a real smart cookie, you will have already joined an organization such as Canadian Women in Communications. If your membership is up for renewal and you're looking to cut corners in your budget, don't eliminate your membership. Not only will it give you concrete affirmation that you really do exist — because your name will be in CWC's Membership Directory — it will offer you an immediate support group with lots of useful services. And let your CWC chapter know that you have lost your job. Chances are, it has more than a few members in the same boat as you.

Use CWC's resources. :

- Check out the website for articles and resources
- Scan Careerline, the CWC's national job posting service for job opportunities.
- Get involved in the Mentorship program: If you have lots of experience, why not volunteer to be a mentor yourself. Giving of yourself is good for your soul, and during transition you need all the warm fuzzies you can get
- Women on Boards: If you're at a senior level, now you have the time to take your game to the next level..
- Taking Care: This instant information service available to CWC members can help you find resources to navigate the emotional and psychological minefield of transition and its ancillary issues. such as child and elder care, drug and alcohol addiction, and credit counseling.
- Banking services. CWC members can get reduced interest rates at the Bank of Montreal, which also offers seminars on financial planning and starting your own business, worthy information to collect during your transition.
- Insurance is also available at excellent rates to CWC members via LMS Prolink Ltd. (Eastern Canada) and HDF Prolink (Western Canada). It handles everything from home and auto insurance, medical and dental benefits, disability insurance, life insurance, travel insurance - even home business insurance.
- Although it may be the last thing you feel like doing, participate in as many events and programs as you can to network, get support and work on your professional development while you have the time.

You'll find you're not alone after all. You aren't from another planet. You're just beginning to explore a new and exciting galaxy. Think of it as your Excellent Transition. When your boss handed you your pink slip, it was your one-way ticket to freedom and a new adventure.



By Jane Christmas

Jane Christmas is a writer whose first book, *The Pelee Project: One Woman's Escape from Urban Madness*, is being released this fall by ECW Press. The book is based on a 15-week series Jane wrote for the *National Post* that chronicled her self-imposed exile to tiny Pelee Island in the dead of winter in order to get her soul back. She lives in southern Ontario with her three children.