

What To Do Next

Taking Your Best Step When Life Is Uncertain

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Just. Keep. Walking.

You see, what to do next requires movement, change, and for you to fill a larger space than where you are right now.

No, it won't be easy. But we didn't sign up for easy; we signed up for worthwhile.

Where will your best next step lead you? To whom will your best next step lead you?

How do I know whether I should stay or leave?

How do I know the difference between fear and wisdom?

How much risk is too much risk?

How do I balance my dreams with the fact that I need health insurance?

How many times will I wake up in the middle of the night and think, Oh no! What have I done? (Spoiler alert: A LOT.)

What do I do now?

Where do I start?

1. Start where you are.
2. Use what you have.
3. Do what you can.

Facts are not there to discourage you; facts are there to inform you.

Let's keep moving. We can't get stuck in regret, worry, or fear. We need to keep moving.

My friend Tim Tassopoulos, president and COO of Chick-fil-A, has often reminded me, "Don't compare yourself to others; compare yourself to your potential."

When you understand your story isn't part of a comparison game, and that the details of your life are not tallied on some comparison scoreboard, it releases some of the pressure.

What's behind you has shaped you, good and bad. What's behind you becomes *dangerous* when it shackles you. What's behind you becomes *helpful* when you embrace where you are as a starting point, not a conclusion. It's why you need to become less judgmental about yourself and much more curious about yourself.

You can't eliminate risk, but you can reduce it.

1. **Manage the financial risk.**
2. **Value your relationships.**

3. **Know your strengths.**

The path to your dream job often leads through your day job.

When we focus on what we don't have instead of being a good steward of what we do have, we will rarely be led to a dream job of any sort.

1. **People.**

2. **Experience.**

A better, stronger, braver you is a great gift to your world.

You've defined where you are, which is a strong step. The next step is to look two enemies squarely in the eye—fear and risk—and ask yourself a good question: “Is it time?”

If you're looking for a sure thing before you move, you probably won't move.

Sometimes the biggest risk isn't leaving; sometimes the biggest risk is staying.

The first step is to come face-to-face with your specific risk.

Pay attention to where the momentum is.

Here's some good news and bad news:

You can't fast-track character.

You can't fast-track experience.

You can't fast-track growth.

The best form of momentum is a more emotionally healthy you. In fact, the more emotionally healthy you are, the better investigator you will become because you can spot the momentum in your life easier.

You can't microwave character, endurance, persistence, and grit.

Discovering what's next is tied to who you are becoming in the process.

In fact, I've got some great news if you have no clue what's next: *You've been given more time to create more personal momentum.*

It's why when I'm asked the “should I stay or should I go?” question, I ask, “How much opportunity do you have to grow your gifts, talents, and leadership ability where you are?” That answer alone should bring some clarity. And here's why: *if there's no room to grow, it's time to go.*

Sidenote: Ultimately, it's not about you and me and our gifts and feeling fulfilled; it's about leveraging our lives in such a way that we are fully where we should be—putting our gifts and talents to use for the betterment of others.

We'd look back on the previous quarter and ask questions such as these:

- What went well, and why?
- What didn't go so well, and why?
- How can we increase momentum in the areas that are going well?
- What can we do to start momentum in areas that aren't going well?

Ultimately, this is how you write a great story with your life. You write great chapters. The better days you have, the better weeks you have. The better weeks you have, the better months you have. The better months you have, the better quarters you have. The better quarters you have, the better life you live. Again, it's that simple. And that hard.

The Right Position Leads to a Better Decision

Sure, some things will go exactly as we've planned and hoped. Some will not. Others are still TBD. Through it all, decide to take on the mindset of an investigator and see where things lead. Resist the temptation to adopt the mindset of a perfectionist. Try to avoid interpreting everything that doesn't go according to plan as a mistake. (The life of a perfectionist is a hard one. After all, when does anything go "exactly as planned"?)

- **Welcome the twists and turns, knowing they lead to better stories and a better life.**
- **Choose release over control.**
- **Trust your intuition while listening to those you trust.**

The goal isn't to have your idea win; the goal is to have the best idea win.

- **Embrace laughter as a business-building strategy.**

Which leads me back to the question, "How do you know if it's time to make a change?"

When you're willing to let go of the bar and lift your hands in the air—that's when.

When we find ourselves in the waiting room, we have three paths to choose from.

1. Waiting passively.
2. Waiting recklessly.
3. Waiting actively.

Waiting passively is when we conclude that life is completely out of our control and we can't do anything to move ourselves forward—kind of like being stuck in a doctor's office and thinking you can do nothing about it.

Waiting recklessly is when our frustration boils over and we leap toward the best available option.

Waiting actively is when we combine wisdom, patience, and an intentional plan to leverage this season.

Wisdom in the waiting room discerns the difference between waiting passively, recklessly, and actively.

"I've been forgotten." That's waiting passively.

"It's my turn *now*." That's waiting recklessly.

"I'm being prepared." That's waiting actively.

You haven't been forgotten. You are being prepared. Believing these statements will help you see the waiting room as a gift, not a curse. It will also help lead you to discover what's next.

Waiting passively squanders the time.

Waiting recklessly forces the time.

Waiting actively leverages the time.

We aren't sitting quietly in the waiting room, just twiddling our thumbs as we wait to be invited into the exam room. We don't simply endure the process; we grow through the process. Our time in the waiting room does not have to be wasted time.

To wait actively is to understand there are things we don't know. There are reasons for waiting that we can't see right now. The best things take time. It's not all on us. We can choose to be present while still being hopeful for the future.

Don't let what you don't know rob you of what you can do.

Here's how to cooperate with the process and grow in the process.

Step #1: Build Your Network

1. Write Down Every Name You Can Think Of in Your Personal Network

2. Rank the Names in Order of Priority

3. Let the Contacting Begin

1. Looking back, what were some of the most helpful strategies that got you to where you are now?

2. What do you know now that you wish you had known ten years ago?
3. What would you do if you were me?

After asking those first three questions, you'll finish with asking the best question I've ever heard when it comes to building your network: *Who do you know that I need to know?*

I want you to ask one follow-up question: *Would you be willing to contact them on my behalf?*

You now have a plan to help you get there. Here it is:

1. Make a list.
2. Make the calls.
3. Set up the meetings.
4. Ask the questions.

Finally, and this is so important, follow up with a thank-you note.

My biggest enemy is the ego that lies within me.

Step #2: Create Optimal Options

When you're debt-free, you have options.

When you have multiple income streams, you have options.

When you have a larger personal network, you have options.

When you are a healthier version of you, you have options.

There's a similar question for the rest of us, especially those of us in the waiting room: *In this season of waiting, how can we discover what our next step should be?*

This leads to one of the key principles in finding your best next step: *the better options you create, the better answers you'll find.*

If so, you need to answer the following question: *What optimal options am I creating financially, relationally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually?*

Step #3: Find Your Muse

Getting inspired requires a moment; remaining inspired requires a plan.

It's a great strategy when you're in the waiting room: *when you don't know what to do, find a who that inspires you.*

Step #4: Developing a Personal Advisory Board

It comes from a passage in the Bible, and no matter what your opinion is about that, this is a principle we can leverage or crash against: “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”

This is one of the greatest pieces of advice you and I will ever receive when it comes to finding what’s next: *the better counsel I have, the better answers I’ll find.*

The Who

There were three key indicators of the kind of people I wanted on my personal advisory board: (1) older, (2) wiser, and (3) experienced.

The Agenda

I’d bring four basic questions to most of the meetings:

1. What am I excited about?
2. What am I worried, anxious, or angry about?
3. What one area do I need the most help with?
4. What would you do if you were me?

When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.

When you’re waiting, *don’t wish the time away; work the time away.* Implement these four steps: (1) build your network, (2) create optimal options, (3) find your muse, and (4) develop a personal advisory board.

The better you finish your current season, the better you begin your next season.

How you leave says a lot more about your character than how you start.

It’s important to note that finishing well requires two parties—you and the organization. How you leave an organization is within your control; how the organization leaves you is outside of your control.

Decisions will be made that are outside of your control. Finish well anyway.

Decisions will be made that will hurt your feelings. Finish well anyway.

Decisions will be made that will spark your friends to come to your defense. Finish well anyway.

Take the high road. Control the controllables. Finish well.

If that sounds a bit depressing, it shouldn’t be. In fact, your most important task as a leader is to finish well. If that sounds like I’m overstating it a bit, consider what happens when a leader finishes well:

- The team is positioned well for life without you.
- The organization is built around a mission, not a person.
- The mission isn’t distracted by controversy.

- The systems you've built carry on without you.
- Momentum is sustained.

Finishing well requires planning.
Finishing well requires vision.
Finishing well requires humility.
Finishing well requires character.

Five Strategies to Help You Finish Strong

1. Communicate Your Finish Plan to the Team

Again, it goes back to the principle we've already mentioned: *the better you finish your current season, the better you begin your next season.*

An emotionally healthy person is self-aware, honors others, and completes the work assigned to them.

My pledge to you is to finish strong by completing the tasks assigned to me to the best of my ability, expressing gratitude to as many people as I can while leaving as quietly as possible.

2. Create a Game Plan for Emotional Health

- How am I fighting for my emotional health?
- Who really knows what's going on inside me?
- If I were to leave my current role in the next three months, how well do I think I would finish?

3. Take the High Road

Taking the high road simply means, "Doing to others as you would like them to do to you."

4. Express Gratitude

Remember, *gratitude is most effective when it's least expected.*

5. Grieve Well

She was just looking out for us as friends, reminding Wendy and me there's always a price when we lead with the heart.

But don't forget, finishing well is your most important task because the true test of your leadership is what happens when you're no longer there.

Here's why: *the path to your dream job often leads through your day job.*

And because I believe this about you, it leads me to a truth about you: *God's thumbprints on you are clues about his plans for you.*

5 Questions for You, Inc.

1. Which activity brings you the most energy?
 - Administrative/Support _____
 - Marketing _____
 - Innovation/Creativity _____
 - Finances _____
 - Sales _____
 - Public Speaking _____
 - Leadership _____
 - Management _____
 - Entrepreneurship _____
2. What is one area or attribute coworkers have referred to as a strength or gift of yours?
3. Who do you know with a similar strength that you could talk to or learn from?
4. What can you start doing to sharpen your strengths?
5. What is one activity that you could start leveraging to sharpen a particular strength?

It's not easy, but remember—we didn't sign up for easy; we signed up for worthwhile.

When you don't know what to do, there are three things to pay attention to: (1) calling, (2) gifting, and (3) timing.

Calling

A calling is when you realize that this is one of the moments you were created for.

Some callings have seasons. Some are forever. To discern between the two, you can't go solely on calling; you must discern your gifting.

Gifting

Calling asks, "Shouldn't someone do something about that?" Gifting asks, "Could that someone be me?"

Timing

You can't control the timing, but you can control what you do during the time. It may be a no for now, but it's not forever. Keep your chin up. Unless you do that, you usually can't see what's next.

The good news is when you have all three aspects—calling, gifting, and timing—you'll discover what's next. The bad news is you don't have complete control over it.

When you leave, leave. Don't linger."

You need to identify, deal with, and let go of anything that may be holding you back.

So we're going to let go of three primary areas, or at least we'll begin the process. We'll focus on

- letting go of past hurts,
- letting go of past mistakes, and
- letting go of what others say.

1. Letting Go of Past Hurts

I love this quote from author Lewis Smedes: "When you release the wrongdoer from the wrong, you cut a malignant tumor out of your inner life. You set a prisoner free, but you discover that the real prisoner was yourself."

If you land the perfect job with bitterness still inside, it will show up. And that's not your best next step. Focusing on your emotional healing is one of the best counterintuitive decisions you'll make when it comes to your next season.

As Lysa TerKeurst wrote in her fantastic book *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*, "If healing hasn't been worked out and forgiveness hasn't been walked out, chaos is what will continue to play out . . . Emotional healing is not so much a level to reach as it is a new way of thinking you choose."

2. Letting Go of Past Mistakes

I've had to learn to convert the mistakes of the past into lessons for the future.

3. Letting Go of What Others Say

After a few blank stares on Zoom, I mustered up the courage to ask, “What is a compulsive affirmationist?”

“No matter how much affirmation you receive,” she said, “it’s never enough.”

I can’t let *imaginary* voices keep me from what I feel like I’m called to do in this next season. I put *imaginary* in italics because that’s what they often are.

One of the most freeing decisions you can make is to let people be wrong about you. You don’t have to defend yourself, even though it may feel good. For every moment you defend yourself against what others may say, that’s one more moment you rob yourself of pursuing what’s next.

Almost always, these new ideas followed a pattern:

- the birth of the idea
- the death of the idea
- the resurrection of the idea
- the ascension of the idea

We went around the circle and did what we call “fist to five.” If you disagree with the decision, it’s a fist. If you agree with the decision, you hold up all five fingers. If you’re somewhere in the middle, you hold up a few fingers. If you’re really opposed, I guess, you hold up your middle finger.

And that’s the ultimate question when it comes to the life cycle of an idea: How do you keep moving so that you get to stage 3?

1. Don’t Ask, “Is This Working?” Ask, “What Am I Learning?”

2. Failure Is an Event, Not a Person

If you’re coming off a rough season where something didn’t work, have you concluded that you’re the failure? Can you see the situation as an opportunity to learn? And can you take those lessons and let it impact what’s next for you?

1. What If This Doesn’t Work?

Instead of asking, *What if this doesn’t work?* I converted it to, *What if this does work?* This conversion helped me view my situation through a different emotional filter.

2. What If My Best Days Are behind Me?

In other words, what if I’ve peaked?

3. You Don't Really Know What You're Doing

I chose to convert this thought from *I don't really know what I'm doing* to *I'm learning how to do something I've never done before*.

4. This Situation Is Unique to You

Thought Converters

What if this does work?

My best days are ahead of me.

I'm doing something I've never done before.

Someone has faced similar challenges; find an iron sharpener.

If we're not careful, though, we can let the unknown paralyze us by overanalyzing the decision—paralysis through analysis, as it's often called. We can analyze a decision away. At some point, we must decide.

I saw a large sign on the premises that read, "Done is better than perfect."

Before we close, I want to add one additional filter to think through: Don't build a life you won't enjoy.

Good opportunities flow to those who leverage their current opportunity.

Choosing the most important people in your life over an opportunity is the right decision, but that doesn't make it any easier.

I'm so grateful we said no to the right opportunities that came at the wrong time, knowing that eventually, somehow, someday, the right time would arrive.