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**The Self-Care Minder – Transition**

**By Jennifer Louden**

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"I don't know what I want (in my career / creative passion / relationships/ all of the above)."

"I know what I want to create next but I AM scared and I don't know how to do it so maybe this means I shouldn't do it."

"I sense rumbling change brewing but I don't know what to do with this rumbling so I keep doing the same thing."

"I've been in this not knowing fog for years... How do I know if I'm kidding myself? What if I never birth what's next?"

Myself, I've been in a "creative transition" for about four years. In that time, I have said or thought some version of these statements. I've certainly heard them from coaching clients, readers, and friends.

The belly of the whale, the dark night of the creative soul, the foggy void, it's not a jolly place to hang out — not knowing is hell on the ego — but it is a wildly fertile, often spine tingling, and essential passage. The price of consciousness is not cheap. Are you willing to pay? To play?

It can seem like you are always in a transition. Technology has increased the frequency of transitions in our lives. Western educated adults are expected to have three careers in a life time. Few find it odd, at least in the US, to go back to school when you're 35 or 52 or 81, sell a business and start a new one, or take up an new artistic discipline. The divorce rate hovers at 50%. People move an average of every 5 years. It appears transitions are here to stay, and it would behoove us all to learn how to negotiate them with dignity, skill, and even a smidgen of grace.

My ideas:

1. Acknowledge the passage

How many of us keep pretending everything is the same when something in us shouts, "This no longer

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works. Something is changing!" If we hang on to the known, the familiar, there is no room for the new. If your car stops moving and you keep insisting nothing is broken, I'll warrant you are driving anywhere until you acknowledge the breakdown. Nothing can change until we recognize our breakdown, until we face what is no longer satisfying or fitting.

### 2. Forget knowing

The very nature of a transition is YOU DON'T KNOW. Often, you don't know what you don't know. Confusion is actually a good sign. Trying to know too soon is a spiritual and learning dead-end. Not to mention paralyzing, misleading, and a great way to feed perfectionism and procrastination.

Instead, train your mind to be more comfortable with not knowing. Try this powerful practice:

[http://www.seishindo.org/practices/dont\\_know.html](http://www.seishindo.org/practices/dont_know.html)

Practicing acknowledging you don't know — directions, how to finish a project at work, what the capital of Uzbekistan is. Say out loud at least once a day, "I don't know."

Gratefully acknowledge "I don't know" as a mood of ripe possibility, the mood of learning. Learning is why transitions exist!

### 3. Cultivate authentic trust

Ask: What criteria can I use to create authentic trust in myself during this time of not knowing?

"Authentic trust exists when you are aware that the possibility for betrayal exists. You choose to trust knowing that when a promise is broken or a commitment is unfulfilled, you can take appropriate and effective action. Authentic trust is a dynamic and evolving part of a relationship that needs constant nurturing." From Julio Olalla's program on trust <http://www.integralmarketplace.com/TrustEbook.htm>

When you are stumbling through a personal fog bank of confusion, acknowledge that the possibility for self-betrayal exists. Don't turn away from this because when you do, you fall into blind trust — trust without parameters, without conditions for satisfaction — and from here it is so tempting to spin into faulty assumptions, ungrounded assessments, magical thinking: the true crater of gloom (which can last for years).

Create conditions for authentic trust for yourself. If I ask my daughter to pluck the tent caterpillars off the blueberry bushes each day but I don't help her be successful, I don't check in with her, I'm blind trusting her. Which is not to say I don't trust her intentions, it's just she may need help executing her intentions. Same for you. If you decide you are going to spend an half an hour every morning asking for guidance about your future, how will you support yourself? Where have you been fuzzy or blind in your commitments to listen before? What or who will waylay you? Where do you need to stretch or strengthen yourself to follow through?

Or if you declare you will take a graphic design course and in the past, you have signed up but then became scared and quit, what will help you to trust the process this time? What needs to be different? Be specific!

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Name in writing what action you can take if you break trust with yourself. How will you regroup? How will you reestablish trust? Look the monster squarely in the face.

### 4. Design generative stories

We all live in stories — it is how our brains make sense of our world. Only problem: when we believe our stories are THE TRUTH or when our stories make our world smaller, dingier, and stingier.

You have the right to play with your interpretation that fear, uncertainty or confusion are a sign that you are on the wrong track or that you are completely screwed. Instead, you could design a story that you are moving to a new level of development, discovering another layer of aliveness, engaging in consciousness. You could ask yourself, "How am I developing new capacities to express my gifts in the world?" and "What practices would support me in finding and taking my next step?"

Surely Christopher Columbus was nervous when he set out to perhaps fall off the edge of the known world. Why shouldn't we be scared when we set out to do something new, especially when we don't know what this new thing is or if we can do it?

Being afraid and ready to jump out of your skin is a normal reaction to change. Acknowledge it as such. Try just being with it, moment by moment. Try being curious about your stories, interpretations, and assessments about why being uncomfortable is bad or wrong.

### 5. Consider what you need to learn

Several years ago, Toni posted this on our message boards:

"I think I've finally figured out why I've been so horribly blocked about photography. I've been processing my classic money excuses for not taking photographs: they don't hold water. The reason I'm hesitant to take out my camera is plain, old-fashioned lack of technical proficiency! I'm never certain whether the way I'm setting the camera is correct. I know this sounds really fundamental and like a big ol' DUH, but it honestly hadn't occurred to me until yesterday.

I progressed from having a "good eye" right into the darkroom, produced some good prints, and I just assumed I knew all I needed to. In fact, I had skipped over a very fundamental part of the learning process. So what happens now is when I pick up my camera, I'm totally paralyzed. My lack of training is what's been holding me back!"

Notice how many new possibilities open for Toni when she asks, "What do I need to learn to move forward?" versus the story "I should already know how to do this. Look how long I've been doing it." Notice too how something that was closed or frustrating to Toni became a ripe new path. How often do we prolong our transitions by refusing to learn, by shoulding on ourselves?

### 6. Question your Assumptions

Notice too how Toni had been operating under unexamined assumptions — "I assumed I knew all I needed to know." Unexamined assumptions are usually the single biggest reason we don't see the possibilities open to us.

Learn the different between assessments or assumptions and assertions or facts. Here are some great

free downloads regarding this:

[http://www.axialent.com/eng/white\\_papers\\_details.asp?codigo=7](http://www.axialent.com/eng/white_papers_details.asp?codigo=7)

[http://www.axialent.com/eng/white\\_papers\\_details.asp?codigo=5](http://www.axialent.com/eng/white_papers_details.asp?codigo=5)

<http://www.comfortqueen.com/archivedNews.html?96>

Investigate what you are saying to yourself about your future. Become aware of thought distortions. A great book for doing that is David Burn's classic *The Feeling Good Handbook*:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0452281326/jenniferlouden/>

## 7. Accept Desire

I'm working on loving my desire to finish my novel, loving the ache and juice of it. I desire to write a spiritually illuminating, wonderful wacky, laugh out loud entertaining, and fascinatingly characterized novel AND my desire does not mean I will. If I insist my desire be met, then my desire dries up and writing becomes a should. Instead, I can entertain, enjoy, get tickled and tortured by my desire all the while telling myself, "No matter what happens, I am okay, I am loved, I am part of Spirit."

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There are many more important aspects of transitions. This is of such great interest to me, I've teamed up with my dear friend and Master Certified Coach Molly Gordon, to offer a powerful, delicious retreat exploring this subject.

Surfing The Edge of the Known: Accepting Change, Honoring Transitions, Opening Space for the New  
An Integral Women's Comfort Retreat with Jennifer Louden and Molly Gordon, MCC September  
16–19th, 2004 Breitenbush Hot Springs, Oregon

More details at <http://www.comfortqueen.com/surfingtheedge.html>

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Jennifer Louden is the Comfort Queen, the best-selling author of the Comfort Book series, a certified coach, the creator of learning events and retreats, and the owner of Comfortqueen.com. She has appeared on numerous radio and TV programs, including Oprah. She's spoken to thousands of women in groups as diverse as the Canadian wilderness and a German bank. She mentors creative women all over the world. There are over 750,000 copies of her books in print world wide and in January, HarperSanFrancisco will update her first four books with new covers and updated resources. She's also a columnist for Body & Soul magazine and at work on her first novel.

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## **Why Schedule a Transition Phase?**

**By Matt Russ**

### **Why Schedule a Transition Phase? by Matt Russ**

The transition phase may be referred to as "off season" training but is not a time to take "off." Actually, there is no "off" season. The transition phase is the time of year to let your body fully recover, both mentally and physically, while maintaining a level of fitness. It is the time to let those nagging little injuries heal up. The transition phase can last 4–6 weeks and occurs directly after the final peak of the season.

I usually give my athletes a week of rest or very limited training following peak, and then start the transition phase. I give them the most flexibility and autonomy during this period. I tell the athlete to take extra rest days if needed and we schedule a few weeks with consecutive days off. Cross training and other activities are encouraged, especially for runners. I like to give the joints and connective tissue a break from the impact of running and will schedule runs as little as 2x per week. I do not encourage racing during the transition phase other than at a base or non-competitive level. I discouraged a race that requires preparation or volume increase.

A typical transition week will have the athlete working out 4–5 days per week with rest days in between. There is no progression. Volume can be greatly reduced as long as there are brief bouts of intensity. I will cut interval volume way down but never eliminate higher intensities completely to maintain aerobic capacity. I do encourage one longer work out per week at a base level to maintain endurance. Some light strength training can occur, mainly to acclimate the body for resistance training. Reps are high, weight low, and the number of sets small. Core work is emphasized.

Mentally it may be hard for you to transition for the first time following peak. If you are used to higher volume and high intensity and you may feel they are going to loose too much fitness. I have found that athletes who transition a few seasons actually look forward to it and may train even harder leading up to transition. It is the light at the end of the tunnel. I like my athletes coming out of transition feeling a bit under trained and ready for the increased volume in base.

Conversely: taking time off completely means spending a majority of your base season making up for lost ground. Each season should build on the last. If you take 8 weeks off you may find your race times are similar to last years (or worse).

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The transition phase is an important part of an annual training plan and should not be overlooked. Be sure you end your season with a transition before you begin the next.

Matt Russ has coached and trained athletes around the country and internationally. He currently holds licenses by USAT, USATF, and is an Expert level USAC coach. Matt coaches athletes for CTS, is an Ultrafit Associate, and owner of [www.thesportfactory.com](http://www.thesportfactory.com)



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