

NAVIGATING CAREER CHALLENGES AND TRANSITIONS THROUGH WRITING

The way we engage with our work often intertwines deeply with our personal identity. David Whyte (2001), a poet and philosopher, emphasizes that our professional endeavors should resonate both with our inner values and with the larger good of the world. This concept is not just about the tasks we accomplish but about who we become in the process of doing our work.

THE IMPACT OF WORK ON IDENTITY

Our careers can profoundly influence our self-perception and well-being. A fulfilling job can feel like a calling, significantly uplifting our spirits. Conversely, losing or leaving a meaningful job, or finding ourselves in a work environment that conflicts with our core values, can lead to stress, anxiety, and even a sense of grief.

CAREER WRITING: A TOOL FOR WELLBEING

Career writing is a therapeutic form that uses creative, expressive, and reflective writing to explore our professional lives. This method allows us to vent frustrations, process complex feelings, and reframe our professional narratives in ways that honor our deepest values (Meijers and Lengelle, 2012).

POETRY: REFLECTIVE WRITING IN ACTION

Here are two poems I wrote, each exploring a challenging work situation. These poems helped me to visualize the struggles and reconsider my perspectives, ultimately integrating these experiences into my broader understanding of my values and purpose.

I.
In this uneven landscape,
I am expected to find solid footing.
You look to me before you step,
or follow in my muddy footprints
without watching the path ahead.

When we begin to sink,
I lift you up, as many as I can carry.

One by one, you push me down
until all that remains of me
is barely enough to find a way back up.
And in that agonizing re-emergence,
I see your hands ready to pull me forward.

They were always there and waiting,
I just couldn't see them with eyes always
seeking the path ahead.

II.
I let myself go before you could.
So many escorted to the door before me.

There is strength in persevering,
but there is also a slow death,
a trickle hardly noticeable until
one day the floor gives way beneath you
from the constant strain.

I wrote a formal letter that felt more like an
ancient scroll and delivered it with all the
grace of a fool performing in your court.

But I still feel the power of choosing to leave
before you could make the choice for me.
I will take what I have learned from you
and turn it into something beautiful.

That is my gift to you.

WRITING EXERCISE

Try crafting your own reflective poem to explore a professional challenge:

1. **Visualize the Situation:** Think of a specific work-related issue. Who was involved? What emotions did it stir in you?
2. **Express Freely:** Write down your immediate thoughts and feelings. Don't worry about coherence or grammar.
3. **Find the Core Image or Feeling:** Review your notes and identify any vivid images or strong emotions that stand out.
4. **Draft Your Poem:** Let your emotions guide your writing. The structure is not important—let it flow freely.
5. **Reflect and Rework:** Read your poem. Does it suggest a new way to view the situation or a different choice you might have made?
6. **Finalize:** Use this insight to complete your poem. Reflect on what this exercise reveals about your professional path and personal values.

Career writing is not just about coping with workplace challenges; it's about transforming our experiences into insights that align with our deepest values. Whether you're navigating a transition, a conflict, or just everyday stresses, writing can be a powerful tool for personal and professional growth.

REFERENCES

Whyte, D. (2001). [Crossing the unknown sea: Work as a pilgrimage of identity](#). Riverhead Books.

Meijers, F. and Lengelle, R. (2012). [Narratives at work: The development of a career identity](#). *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 40, 157-177.