

Leaping Into Space

By Keith Eric Grant, PhD, NCTMB

Moving forward means taking risks. Change for most people creates anxiety, because change is moving into the unknown and the unfamiliar. Most people stay where they are to avoid the uncomfortable feelings, such as fear and anxiety, that change and growth creates.

There is no blueprint for change. There are no guarantees. Change means taking a risk.

- *Donna Kimmelman*⁵

In the volcanic Shasta-Cascade region of northern California, the ice-cold waters of the upper McCloud River cascade over three spectacular waterfalls.⁴ Just above the lower falls is a relatively flat zone where layers of smooth rock, exposed to the late summer sun, define both shallow pools for wading and splashing and warm dry areas for simple reclining. Lying beneath the falls is a deep, emerald pool encircled by rocks 20-30 feet high. At one edge of the pool, a steel ladder, rising to the cliffs above, has been fastened to the rock. One by one, we accept the challenge of dropping from an overly hot summer's day off the cliff into the icy waters below. After watching how others take the leap (and miraculously survive), I stand with my bare feet on the warm smooth rock as I look down. A last moment of uneasy hesitation, a small impulse of my leg muscles, and then I feel myself dropping. The rush of the water enveloping my legs comes simultaneously with the sound of my splash. Then, it is cold and quiet, with a deep blackness below and a greenish glow of light above. An instant later, my head breaks the surface, breath returns, and I swim to the ladder for the climb back up; leaving the chill of the water behind, but keeping the exhilaration.

There are moments we face in life, much like my jump from the cliffs, when we must summon our resolve to move into the unknown. Sometimes those moments are the result of our seeing an opportunity for personal growth or more business and initiating a change. Sometimes those moments are the result of a door closing behind us, leaving us unexpectedly looking for a new door to open. Transition consultant William

Bridges characterizes change as the shift that occurs in the external world, and transition as the internal "process of letting go of the way things used to be and then taking hold of the way they subsequently become". In between the letting go and the taking hold, there is a neutral zone that is both chaotic and creative.¹ Bridges advocates examining change based on asking three questions. "What is changing? What will actually be different because of the change? Who's going to lose what?"² The questions clarify understanding of both the substance of the change and the inescapable process of having to let go of something familiar to create room for something new.

"We must walk consciously only part way toward our goal, and then leap in the dark to our success."

- *Henry David Thoreau*

Since change is inevitable in our lives, we can help the process along by taking an occasional glance at the horizon. By anticipating changes before they arrive, we gain time to either change our own responses and skills or to seek a new situation. Some years ago, I took a row-it-yourself raft trip down the Green and upper Colorado Rivers through the rapids of Cataract Canyon.³ Each of us had a chance to be in command through at least one of the rapids. Before running each rapid, we walked ahead to look for the rocks and holes to avoid and the tongue of moving water to center on. Between rapids, we also looked for a place to "eddy out" and catch our breaths.

Doing what we can to figure out the directions in which to move, the places to avoid, and how to rest and recenter ourselves are as good strategies for career and life as they are for rafting. There are times, however, in both rafting and life in which our course doesn't play out as we have planned. When we are struck by a crisis, having an affirmation on hand for reaching down to our deeper strengths can help us to avoid being too paralyzed to find and take needed steps.

"I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain."

- *Frank Herbert (Dune)*

Sometimes the unknown isn't as much about external change as it is about feeling vulnerable while expanding the limits we've placed on our own behavior. On first entering massage training, for example, students may experience this feeling of vulnerability from greatly increased body awareness and touch

interacting with previously unconscious scripts of body image and use. Bringing limiting body-connected scripts to conscious awareness and decision-making is a process of integration I refer to as "learning the names of our dragons"; an important step in sorting out the ways we will later nonverbally project and be role models for our clients.

Feelings of vulnerability also manifest simply from expanding our technical repertoire. I was recently reminded of this lesson in moving from my relatively "Mack truck" venue of sports and deep-tissue massage to take classes in lymphatic drainage. The subtlety of mapping the timing and direction of the waves of lymph flow stepped outside my previous skills to return me to feelings of novice ineptitude. I was immediately grateful for the shared warmth and support of my fellow students. Learning new kinesthetic skills is not instantaneous. During kinesthetic learning and integration we can often feel clumsy. Even previously mastered techniques can temporarily feel awkward before our kinesthetic vocabulary all comes together again.

Consciously creating the habit of taking small leaps into space makes us more adept at the process of our own transitions and better able to lend a hand to others. We let ourselves take more risks once we learn we are in an environment that is safe and nurturing. This type of environment is something we can work to create for others and ourselves.

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

References

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