

Coaching Leaders Through Transitions

By Tony Stoltzfus

Transitions: Promise and Peril

Walking with leaders through transitions draws on a coach's skill in helping leaders discern God's true agenda in a time that may call for equal parts letting go and getting on with life. New, exciting opportunities come to capable leaders in transition – and the rush of taking on a new challenge seems especially appealing when what we were doing before has come to a frustrating end. But how do you figure out if that new position or new idea is God's open door or if it is an Ishmael: close to the mark, but more a product of your own need to accomplish something than it is a result of God's plan.



God spoke very clearly to Abraham about his destiny, and the child of promise that would come into his life. At the time God spoke, Abraham was certain of what he was supposed to do. But as the years passed and Abraham and Sarah didn't see God's word come true, they started to wonder. Circumstances (their advanced age) seemed to completely rule out what God had said. How were they supposed to have a son when Sarah was way past child bearing age?

Abraham and Sarah finally took things in their own hands and created an Ishmael. I'm sure they felt quite chagrined when God spoke afterward that this was NOT the child of promise, and that God was going to do things in his way and his time. God even choose to bless the son of their failure, and make a nation of him, but Ishmael would not spawn THE nation. And Abraham's jumping the gun had unintended consequences that persist to this day.

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There are several vital steps coaches use to help us stay on track in transitions. First, we need perspective on the journey. As we walk toward the thing God has set before us, there are virtually always roadblocks or adverse circumstances in the way. Often our unspoken expectation is that if this is really *GOD's* will, everything will work out. Won't things go smoothly if God is really in them? And if things are falling apart, couldn't that mean we've missed God?

The reality is exactly the opposite. In fact, we should **expect** difficulty in the course of following God's call. Pursuing our destiny is meant to grow us up into the full measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. It takes a challenging road to do that, not an easy one. We all need a coach to remind us when we meet difficulty that the challenge is what makes us rise up to greatness. Part of a coach's role is to call the leaders you are working with to rise up and see their situation from the perspective of the larger purposes of God, instead of from the perspective of how inconvenient and frustrating our situation is.

Second, coaches need to help their clients clarify and record what God has spoken to them. That's the reason we set goals, develop life purpose and mission statements, or push leaders to articulate their values. The problem Abraham and Sarah had is that when circumstances grew difficult they were tempted to reinterpret what God had promised; to help God out with a little polygamy to make sure their destiny really happened. The more clearly and widely you've stated who you are and what you are called to do, the less likely you are to waffle on it when the going gets tough.

A much better response to God's voice came when Abraham entered Palestine and God told him this was the place: he raised an altar as a physical symbol of what God had said to him. From then on, Abraham could always come back and say, "Here's where God spoke to me and here's what he said." Like Abraham, we need those physical symbols so that we are not tempted to go back and throw open everything we've heard from God to reinterpretation when things get tough. This is why scripture encourages new believers to testify publicly and go through the ordinance of baptism: it moves God's work from something that happened privately inside our hearts and makes it a public reality.

As a coach, there are several techniques you can use to help a client raise their own altar. A stated goal with some accountability behind solidifies a leader's commitment to what God has spoken. Even better is to encourage the leader to share what God has spoken with some close friends, or even to do it publicly. The most powerful course (which also takes the most time) is to walk with the leader through the process of discovering and clarifying their calling, values, strengths and giftings. Knowing and having written down who you are and what you are called to is a rock you can hang on to in the uncertainty of any transition.

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