

Mind The Gap!

—your story during and through a time of transition.



Following a presentation Sheila waited until the hubbub had died down then asked us how the Divanation™ processes could be applied to “someone, like me, in transition.” “You’re in transition?” “Well,” she paused, “I’m thinking about a career change. I’m wondering how and if to make the next

move? Then she came straightforward with it: “How can telling my story help?”

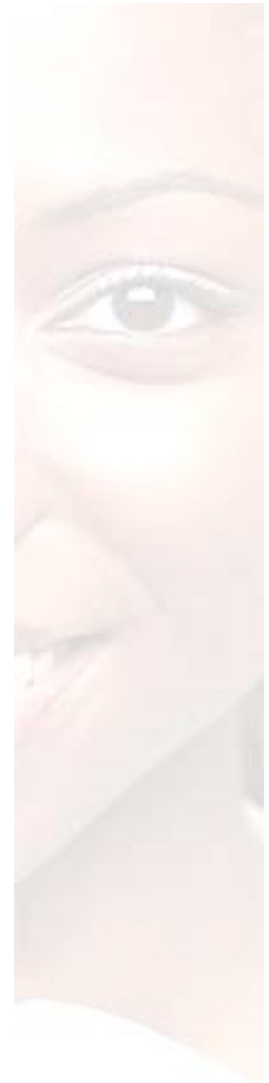
We sat down, the wait staff collecting dishes and silverware around us, and we listened to the story of a successful and extremely talented and tenacious executive struggling to find a path from her 15-year, service-industry corporate position into the not-for-profit world. She was adamant, almost bouncing in her chair, that she wanted to help at-risk teenagers come to believe in themselves and to rely on education as a key to success. But she confessed that she was a bit befuddled on how to get “from here to there.”

When she had finished I asked her, “Why do you want to do this?” Almost before I could get the words from my mouth, she swept us away in two brief tales: One about her high school math teacher, and, then, took us back further, where we stopped at a wooden-floor grocery store, “three blocks up the street” from her childhood home in Iowa. In the span of five minutes Sheila told how each had a profound and lasting affect on her, which she now felt compelled to “pay forward.”

The math teacher, Mrs. Schmitzer, had spent after-class time with Sheila to “sort out some trig problems.” High school, for Sheila, was a period of family tumult and things were “dicey.” She learned from this “special person” that if she focused she “could do this.” Mr. Hamel, the grocer, had shown her how to use an “old, big-key cash register.” He would “wave me behind the counter. I would collect money from customers and make change. I just loved this. He trusted me and I felt special.”

In telling us these two stories, Sheila began to see a path forward.

Though this was only part of her putting her transition story together, she began to see continuity from “there,” into the present, to the not-for-



profit world in her future. For instance, she saw more clearly and seamlessly how these two early experiences provided her the grounding and desire to help others. She also saw the ties to some of her other core values: fairness, generosity, forgiveness, self-sufficiency. We call this Minding the Gap—paying attention to those silences in your story, where the clarity is muddy, the connections uncertain, those places where there is pause in the telling.

In the subsequent weeks we worked with Sheila by phone and video chat. By Minding the Gap she illuminated other dark spots in her story. By looking at those things/activities Sheila actually does in her life, we quickly identified that she serves as a mentor within her company and she spends time, through a church group, tutoring kids both in math and English. She has strategic planning and leadership skills that are well documented. She is adept at budgeting, is absolutely captivating in front of groups, and is down-home empathetic with others.

Very importantly, by Minding the Gap, Sheila was able to recognize that her corporate position, while providing a stable income for her and her two sons, has become hollow and a bit heavy, not because she dislikes the job or the people, but because she felt her passion to help others in a more “rubber-meets-the-road, closer-to-the-source manner” was not being fulfilled. In part, she continued with the job because she was “successful” and “didn’t want to disappoint others by making a change that might be seen as quitting, or letting others down.” Sheila had worked very hard to secure her career, financial stability, and general sense of well being. What she was having trouble with was narrating her way into her passions, her callings, in a way that she could embody and embrace that, in turn, would provide the sense-making for her to at least test-story the waters of transition. By Minding the Gap, she was able to generate and own her transition-narrative and begin to move forward.

There certainly are more pieces of Sheila’s story, specifically around the congruency between her not-for-profit aspirational story and her desire to find integrated spiritual fulfillment, but that story is for another telling.

If you are considering a change or transition of any sort, we suggest that you say, articulate, what specifically is the imagined change—tell it to somebody! Then continue the story, telling how it is that you’ve come to want to do this. What chapters, story pieces, events, beliefs, skill sets, and personality style traits make this future chapter make sense? Does the story flow, does it have continuity, does it make sense, is it believable? Where there are those uncertain connecting pieces, those pregnant pauses, those stumblings in the telling—Mind the Gap!



For more information on how storytelling and identity development can assist with transitional concerns, contact:

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