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Ask Jill
By Jill Kanter

When Others Bring You Their Problems...

Dear Jill,

I seem to attract people who want to tell me their problems. This is a pattern that happens at work, as well as in my personal relationships. I started my own business three years ago, and I still get calls for help from people at my old company. Is there a way to prevent this?

Thank you,
Melanie

Dear Melanie,

I've worked with many clients who've found themselves the key confidant or counselor in their workplace. While it can be very fulfilling to help others, it also can be draining to do this in excess. I encourage you to contemplate the following questions:

- Why do you think that others come to you with their problems?
- Are there parts of this role that you actually like, and if so, why?

Your responses will help guide how to move forward. You may learn that a part of you is actually fed by counseling others—for instance, that it builds your self-esteem. In this case, you may decide to shift your focus from being there for others to being there for yourself—something ultimately more rewarding.

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Breaking this pattern will also require communicating differently with those who approach you for help. Many have found the following resources very helpful.

Stand Up For Your Life, A Practical Step-By-Step Plan To Build Inner Confidence And Personal Power, by Cheryl Richardson.

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most by Sheila Heen, Bruce Patton and Douglas Stone.

Most importantly, be gentle with yourself as you release this pattern. It takes courage to pursue positive change and I'm sure that you'll attract just the help you need!

Embracing Career Change...

Dear Jill,

I've been doing project management work for most of my career. I used to find it very fulfilling, but have become increasingly bored the past few years. I've tried to motivate myself, but the truth is, I just don't want to do it anymore. I'm over 40 and can't imagine what else I'd do. I feel trapped and would appreciate your thoughts.

Thank you,
Sandra

Dear Sandra,

It sounds like you're experiencing something that many face in mid-career: a once rewarding profession has gradually lost its appeal. They say that when one door closes, another opens—and it's true—however, it usually takes some time to discover one's next career. While it can be stressful to pursue transition, it also can be one of the most exciting periods of your life. Here are a few suggestions to help you get started.

- First, reassure yourself that nothing is wrong (as often as you need to). Leaving your current profession is a required step in identifying a new, more rewarding one.
- Find the right career coach for you—someone qualified, who can support you through each step of your transition.
- Contact the Career Planning Office at colleges or universities that you've attended. There may be many services of interest and often at no charge.
- Begin keeping a daily journal, focused on how you're experiencing your transition. Recording hopes and fears not only can reduce stress, but also will create a timeline with important milestones.
- Try to find or create a support group of other transitioners. Peer coaching can positively affect the pace, duration and ultimate success of your journey.
- Step up your personal self-care (e.g., diet, exercise, rest, etc.). This effort alone can greatly increase your well-being.

And when and if you feel that things aren't happening fast enough, try to be patient. The growth you're achieving through this transition may be required for success in your new career!

If you have a question about a leadership or team issue in the workplace, please write to AskJill@womenandbiz.com.

Jill Kanter is a management consultant, speaker and writer with expertise in leadership development, team effectiveness and organizational change. She brings a strong practical approach and highly developed intuition to projects incorporating executive coaching, team development, workplace improvement and career empowerment.

Jill has worked extensively with clients in large, dynamic organizations in the financial services, hospital/healthcare, telecommunications and high-tech industries, as well as institutions of higher education and a variety of non-profits. She founded her firm in 1990, after earning her Ed.M. from Harvard University. You can reach Jill at 617-469-0100 or jdk@jillkanter.com. For more information about Jill Kanter, visit her website at www.jillkanter.com.

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