

Lessons Learned from Making a Life Transition

By Deborah Lee, PhD, RN - Better Choices Health Coaching, Naples



The Back Story

I am often asked why I made the transition from having a successful career in teaching and health care policy and administration to integrative health coaching. I am sharing my personal story here in the hope that others who see themselves in a similar situation can know that it is possible to change the trajectory of your life when it seems there is no way to do so, and to share some of the lessons learned along the way. I looked at my life transition as a "mid-life opportunity," rather than a mid-life crisis, which is where I was headed.

After 25-plus years of working in the demanding field of health care, I found myself obese, anxious and depressed with a multitude of physical health issues. I struggled with weight my entire life, but it became more difficult when the demands of my career increased. I went through several cycles of losing and gaining 40 pounds or more over a number of years. Not only were my weight fluctuations a result of the stress I was feeling, but I developed other physical symptoms- migraine headaches, fibromyalgia, bladder issues, chronic gastritis- not to mention, overwhelming anxiety. I was soothing myself by binge eating. Clearly this was not the way I wanted to live.

So, how did I make the life transition to change my career, practice self-care and heal my mind and body? Of course it didn't happen overnight because you don't get this way overnight. I had to do something different because obviously what I'd done in the past was not working.

Making the Transition and the Lessons I Learned

The basis for making the transition from the old to the new me was to reframe the negative thinking and behaviors that were not serving me well. I adopted an attitude of "failing forward." In other words, I realized I had to learn from what hadn't worked in the past and not do it again and use my failures as information to help me get what I wanted and moving forward.

The next step was to be patient with myself for the first time in my life. I knew I had to experience true lifestyle change and that was going to take time. For years I thought I understood what "lifestyle change" meant, but I had never been able to truly do it because my goal was to lose the weight fast and not pay attention to what I was learning along the way, so I always regained the weight. If I was patient, that meant I could take time to pay attention.

Hand-in-hand with patience was throwing out the rigidity I'd always had with eating and exercise and adopting an attitude of flexibility. For example, eating out when I was trying to lose weight was always an exercise in frustration because I thought I had to be so rigid with every meal I ate. What I realized was when I made better choices with my meal selection when eating out and modified how I ate that day, I was fine. This is part of lifestyle change because it means you don't give up something you enjoy, it means you figure out how to keep what you enjoy in a way that keeps you on your path. I have not given up any food I enjoy. I still eat those foods but I eat them rarely and I enjoy them even more now because they are a special treat. The same flexibility applies to exercise. I don't always have to do a full-blown, long workout. If I can only fit in 30 or fewer minutes, I do that, rather than having the all-or-nothing attitude I used to have.

"Failing forward," patience, and flexibility are just a few of the lessons I learned. All of these came together in a way that allowed me to be kinder and gentler with myself. We think we don't have willpower or that we are lazy or weak when we can't make significant changes. On the contrary, sustainable lifestyle change is not easy. Read , "The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business," by Charles Duhigg. You will understand why it is so difficult to make behavior change happen.

I engaged a life coach to help me figure out the next evolution of my career, and here I am! Integrative health coaching allows me to marry my professional and personal passion, skills and experience. If you'd like to have a plan and partner for YOUR journey to make sustainable changes in your life, please contact me at [Deborah.Lee@Better Choices Health Coaching.com](mailto:Deborah.Lee@BetterChoicesHealthCoaching.com) or **239-580-7333**. I've been there and done that!

Deborah Lee, PhD, RN is an Integrative Health Coach and President of Better Choices Health Coaching based in Naples. She received her training at Duke Integrative Medicine's Integrative Health Coach Professional Training Program. She brings 30



years of professional and personal experience to her integrative health coaching practice. After working as a hospital and home care nurse, researcher, university professor, public health professional and health care administrator in the U.S. and Canada, she decided to return to the root of why she became a nurse; to help people feel better and stay healthy. Deborah can be reached at Deborah.Lee@BetterChoicesHealthCoaching.com