

Deciding to Stay

Kari Murphy | Ball State University | @KariAMurphy

In thinking about the topic of transition, I hope my experiences offer some insight for readers when faced with the same dilemma: whether to stay in a current role or whether to search for a new opportunity.

About nine years ago, a mentor of mine went through an interview process, was offered the job, but decided to stay in her current role. I will never forget the words she said to me: “Kari, sometimes the best decision isn’t the decision to leave, but to stay.” Every time I have participated in a job search since then, those words rang in my mind.

Over the past two years, I have searched my mind and my heart and asked many others for opinions and answers for what I believe to be the “correct” answer about what I should do next in my career. In leaving my first position, I knew I needed a new challenge; I wanted to work with a larger community and a larger staff. When I found a new opportunity offering all of those pieces, the decision to move came easily. When I left my second job, I wasn’t looking for a new role. An opportunity presented itself which I couldn’t say no to.

During my eighth year in the profession, my mind started racing, wondering if I was in the right position, if I was in the right place, if I was making the right decision to stay, and if I was happy. This is the year I truly learned to compartmentalize things and was able to leave work at work. That year, I also started looking at what could be next. I started applying casually. I had several phone interviews and was invited on campus. I chose not to take the interview. I wasn’t sure the time was right. I was optimistic and knew there was good work to be done right where I was. As the year ended, I started thinking more about what was next, what I was looking for, and what I didn’t want in the near future for my life and my career. So, I started applying again.

In making this decision, I wanted to talk to people close to me, but I didn’t want others’ opinions. I knew I had to decide to fully commit to staying or fully commit to finding something else. I considered the opportunities available to me, the idea of moving (the good and the bad that come with it), and the people I had connected with in my current role – colleagues and students. After two years of searching for the right answer, I made the right decision for me. I decided to stay.

For me, the answer was easy when I truly thought about it. In most interviews, at some point you are asked why you want the position and why you want to be at that place. For most, this is an easy question, one which you don’t have to prepare an answer to. For two years, I had to prepare that answer. I realized I was trying to convince myself that moving on was the right decision for me. Once I articulated this realization to a colleague, I knew my answer.

I continued to be asked if I was searching. When I answered no, the next question was why. I shared with one of my staff members that I felt needed. The needle still needed to be moved

and in many instances, I wanted to move it. I wanted to advocate for others, to engage in conversations about inclusion, to aid in pioneering new ideas and programs, to build new relationships, and to continue to think about fraternity/sorority life differently.

I chose to stay for opportunities, for the unknown, for imperfection, for people, but most of all, for me. This journey helped me to identify what was working well and what changes I needed to make to help me be a better professional for the community in which I work.