Late Career Re-Engagement and Transitions

Here are some perspectives that have proven helpful to physician executive coaching clients in decided "What next?" towards the later stages of their career.

Understand thought patterns and feelings that may inhibit seeing the possibilities

- Human beings survived as a species because we have a mind that constantly generates thoughts and feelings to "keep us safe." This is the mind evolution has given us and it has a predisposition to scan the environment for threats. Because of this, when we are not focused on a task demanding our present attention the vast majority of the thoughts and feelings that our mind generates are negative in nature, such as:
    - Worry, fear and anxiety.
    - Constant comparison to others.
    - Perfectionism and overachieving.
    - Imposter syndrome ("I am not good enough to be doing this.")
    - Wanting to please people all the time.
    - Guilt, never wanting to disappoint others.
    - Catastrophic thinking, over preparation to avoid worst case scenarios.
    - The constant chatter in our heads of our "inner critic" evaluating all we do.
- When we get hooked by these thoughts and feelings, we can act in ways that are not beneficial to us. It can keep us from seeing and pursuing opportunities that will make us happy. Here is a way we can “unhook” from unhelpful thoughts and feelings:
    - Key concept: *We <u>have</u> thoughts and feelings, but we are <u>not</u> our thoughts and feelings.* We can't make this constant flow of thoughts and feelings go away, but we can create distance and "unhook" from them, so they don't drive our behavior or overwhelm us. Eventually, like changing weather, thoughts and feelings pass.
    - Observe your thoughts and feelings with some distance by *noticing* and *labeling* your thoughts and feelings. Instead of saying “I need everyone to be happy with me!” say “I am noticing 'people pleaser' thoughts." Other examples, "I am noticing my perfectionist.” "I am noticing catastrophic thoughts." "I am noticing thoughts of guilt."
    - Then ask yourself “How helpful are these thoughts and feelings to me in this present moment?" and "How helpful are these thoughts and feelings for moving toward being the person I value being to all the people in my life?”
    - Mindfulness meditation can strengthen our ability to "unhook" from our thoughts. Think of mindfulness meditation as "going to the gym to build my noticing and unhooking ability." The app "Ten Percent Happier", particularly the seven free "The Basics" lessons, can be very helpful in building a meditation practice.

Pay attention to what really engages you

- What engages you most may have changed over time and may not be what think it is.
- Over a few weeks notice when you are happily engaged, in a 'flow state", and note what you are doing. Many coaching clients will use "Notes" on their iPhone and then the discern the pattern that emerges over a series of weeks.This can be helpful information for tool described in next section.

Use this "three circle" tool to examine possibilities



- Think about and list what you are passionate about and love doing.
- Think about and list what you are really good at and have developed some mastery over the years.
- What is on *both* lists? That is, what are you good at AND love doing. It is important to understand that you can become really good at something that you really don't love doing, or love doing anymore. And you can really love doing some things that you may not have mastery over. Neither of these present good paths forward.
- Now think about the overlapping "Passion/Love Doing" AND "Mastery/Good At" items and consider if there is a "Market/Need" for these skills and abilities. The need could be at your current organization or elsewhere. This nexus of all three is the sweet spot of potential areas to explore. You may need to do some information gathering, including getting others perspectives, to determine how much of a "Market/Need" exists.
- Do this in moments you put aside for purposeful reflection as well as paying attention to what arises as you move throughout the weeks ahead. Don't do this when you are tired or in an unhelpful emotional state.

All change requires that we Navigate a transition

- Once you have decided on a change, realize that the change itself will not be the hardest part, it will be the psychological transition that you will begin traveling through. Transitions are hard, even ones we look forward to. They take time and typically involve three phases:
  1. ***Ending, Letting Go:*** We need to let go of the comfortable present. We may need to say goodbye to people or activities we will miss and grieve this loss.
  2. ***The Neutral Zone***: We experience a loss of equilibrium, feeling anxious, stressed, out of sorts. It is normal and expected to feel this way, just keep moving forward.
  3. ***The New Beginning:*** We accept, embrace, and flourish our new reality.

We have one life, and for most American's it is a little over 4000 weeks long. If you are late career, you may, have a number of weeks left that's in the hundreds. How do you want to spend that precious time?