Stability / Stagnation

Last week I kicked off a September series exploring how we decide what deserves our time.

I discussed then that the notion to "say no more" or "say yes to everything" are both misguided. There are a variety of factors that go into whether you should accept or decline any particular opportunity. Swatting opportunities away so you can focus on other priorities is occasionally the exact right move, even if those opportunities are extremely tempting. Other times, agreeing to opportunities is the best move. Season of less or season of yes? Sadly, no universal heuristic can be applied.

Today, I'd like to explore one flavor of that concept, diving more deeply into the difference between stability and stagnation.

At some point in your career, you might find yourself in the same role for several years. Maybe, for instance, you have taught 7th grade math for ten consecutive years at the same school.

When that occurs, it's not uncommon for others to start pestering you with questions like: "Have you ever thought about becoming a principal / assistant principal / dean of students / some other role?" Or maybe, "Have you thought about teaching a different

grade / teaching a different subject / moving to a new school?" If you don't receive these questions from others, perhaps you begin to ask them of yourself.

So what's the right answer? After completing a similar role for a considerable amount of time, should you continue to do so? Or should you stretch yourself for a different position?

Just like there is no universal answer for "yes or less," there's no universal answer for "should I stay or should I go," either. There are good reasons to stay in a long-serving role and bad reasons; there are good reasons to try for stretch positions and bad reasons. It all depends on your values and your context. One way to help process that is to consider the difference between stability and stagnation.

You might think: "I'm continuing to do what I do because the world needs a little more reliability. I can be better for myself, my personal commitments, and the world around me by rooting in the place I find myself. I'm going to stick to one thing, and get to be the best I can at that one thing. And in exchange, I have additional capacity to myself, my family, and my community." If you feel that way, it sounds to me like stability, and if that's your value, I applaud that.

If, on the other hand, you take a good honest look at the situation and think, "I'm continuing to do what I'm doing because I'm afraid," that's stagnation. And while I understand that, it's harder for me to celebrate.

If you find yourself in a place of continuity and you're deciding what to do, before you're tempted with either the glitz of a new opportunity or the comfort of the familiar old, take a moment to take stock of your values. Let those values and the honest self-assessment that accompany them guide you, regardless as to whether that leaves you to stay or stretch.

Make good choices, -Kevin