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Three Lies I Told Myself & How I Overcame Them

Colleen Rivera

I'll let you in on a little secret of mine... I hate change! My furniture is still in the same arrangement as when we moved into our home 16 years ago, I order the same dish at the same restaurants, I spring break at the same Florida location year after year, and I worked for the same educational organization for over 20 years. It's not that I'm a boring person, I just like to know what to expect. There's something comfortable about living a life with a minimal number of surprises. It's like a cozy cocoon.

However, for me, living in this comfort zone of no surprises eventually became constricting and held me back- especially in my career. Complacency became my friend until, one day, the familiar wasn't comfortable anymore (gasp!). As the pleasure I had derived from my teaching job began to dwindle, I tried desperately to make it work. Out of this desperation to stay in my little cocoon (even though it was no longer cozy!), I did one of the worst things a person can do. I told myself lies.

At this low point, I had two choices. One, I could rot inside of that cocoon of lies and keep telling myself it was cozy. Or, two, I could get real with myself and prepare for a beautiful transition. Being a survivor at heart, there was really only one viable option.

1. ***"I would be throwing away everything that I've built up- experience, seniority, sick time, a comfortable place on the salary schedule."***

In the field of education, all these things really show is how long you can stick it out. Experience is the number of years you lasted. Seniority is the number of years you lasted in relation to everyone else. Sick time is a measure of how many times you should have stayed home but didn't. And as for the salary schedule, well, it's what someone else thought it was worth for someone (anyone) to last a year. Basically, it's generic and unmeaningful.

A teacher who works nights and weekends; takes courses and workshops for professional development; plans lessons that are standards-based and engaging; differentiates instruction for a variety of learners; and makes decisions based on data brings home the same money as a teacher who doesn't do any of those things. It's very impersonal and unfair.

To overcome this lie, I just had to look at the information above and realize that I really wasn't valued. I wasn't recognized for what I had to offer besides my time. What I had "built up" was the ability to show up in a consistent way. Shoot, a chimpanzee could do that! To change into the butterfly I longed to be, I would have to take my skills, knowledge, and talents to another arena. I would have to find a place where those things mattered and were acknowledged. For me, that was the freelancing world. The truth of the matter is that I do have valuable skills to offer, and freelancing allows me to use a number of my skills in a variety of ways. It also gives me autonomy over my schedule and compensation. I now feel that I am recognized and paid on the basis of my many merits.

2. "I'm not 'techy' enough to make it in the business world."

I spent 20 years teaching in a juvenile detention center where the integration of technology into the classroom was discouraged. As a result, I wasn't motivated to learn new technologies such as Google classroom, FlipGrid, and Edpuzzle since I wouldn't be able to use them with students. I knew I was a step behind though. I would hear the cool things my own kids were doing in their schools, and it would make me sad that my students couldn't have those experiences, too.

When it came time for me to leave the education field, my confidence was shot in the technology realm. WordPress, Trello, Canva, MailChimp? I had never heard of them. How in the world was I going to compete with the young professionals who had practically come out of the womb with an iPad in their hands?

In order to overcome this lie, I needed to calm down and realize that nobody has all the answers. I may not have any idea what Toggl is, but I do know that I can research it and learn. I can certainly sign up for a free trial of GetStencil and give the tool a try. I may not have all of the answers, but I have a good head on my shoulders. I am resourceful and a quick learner. I have all I need to survive.

3. "Leaving teaching will reflect badly on me."

There is a certain amount (ok, a huge amount!) of pride that comes with being a teacher. What could possibly feel more noble and important than changing young lives? I took teaching very seriously and devoted myself wholeheartedly to it. Teaching became a significant part of my identity. Sometimes, I'm sad to say, it even took precedence over my family.

As a teacher of at-risk students, I preached perseverance. Don't quit school, don't quit trying, don't quit caring. This made it especially difficult for me to even consider resigning. Resigning is just a nicer way of quitting. How could I quit when I always told my students not to? That was a tough one.

And then there was the judgment to consider. I was afraid that people would think I couldn't hack it (after 20+ years!). I didn't want them to think I was weak.

Like the other lies I told myself, overcoming this one involved changing my mindset. Who cared what others thought of me? I was doing this for my own well-being and the well-being of my family. I was stressed, tired, and worn down. It was time to stop caring about other people's opinions and take care of me. The change to freelancing was liberating. I was able to set up an environment that I was happy in and in which I could thrive. I left unreasonable expectations and assumptions behind me. And I never looked back.

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Colleen Rivera is a soon-to-be former teacher who is following her dream to make a living from her love of writing. When she's not writing, Colleen is spending quality time with her family and rescue dog, Bella. You can connect with Colleen on her business Facebook page [Word Work by Colleen](#).