

A good stretch after a long nap

Written by Julie Desmond
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Getting anywhere in life and in work requires movement. Sometimes we walk, sometimes we run, sometimes we're pushed in a new direction by people or circumstances. Occasionally, we stretch.

Stretch. An unnatural movement, shifting from one pose into another, often quite different, position. A good stretch after a long nap is the most liberating feeling. A professional stretch after a long, comfortable career nap is sometimes uncomfortable, but always rewarding.

Careerwise, there are two kinds of stretches. One is when there is a branch above and a roaring river below and the nearest companion is the sheer face of a one hundred foot cliff.

This is the stretch of someone who jumps recklessly, getting involved in too much too soon. It happens to everyone at some stage. The grass looks so much greener, the potential for more (money, recognition, power) is right there for the taking, we think. So we stretch our commitment level beyond what we're capable of achieving. Stretching without thinking is risky; succeed, and the world is yours. Fail, and you might take your career and those around you down with you.

If you discover yourself stretching this way, your best survival strategy is to slow down and take an honest assessment of where you are. Look behind you at where you've come from, look ahead of you at where you are going, and seek out some familiar landscapes: aspects of the task or project that are familiar to you. Use these to gain a foothold and to move forward.

For example, say you volunteer to train your co-workers on new company policies and procedures. You have never taught a thing to anyone in your life. Even your dog learns his tricks from someone else. Standing in front of your peers and telling them how to behave is terrifying to you.

Look for the familiar in this situation. You do not know much about teaching. But you helped develop the policies you are addressing, so you have solid knowledge of your subject matter. Stretch into training by focusing on what you know, the policies. Think about how to make the subject matter interesting, based on what you know about it and about your peers. Decide in advance what you hope to accomplish and then move forward in that direction. Don't fail because you've never taught before; succeed because you are an expert on policies.

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The kind of stretch is when the brass ring is just above your head and your feet are planted firmly on solid ground, with friends wrapped around your ankles to keep you steady while you grow into whatever comes next.

This is usually the easiest, most successful stretch. It is low risk, because you can clearly see your goal, you have the skills you need to take the next steps and you have the support of others which is so essential in any career move.

Some people miss out on opportunities to stretch into what naturally comes next because it seems too obvious, too simple. If you see someone else struggling and say to yourself, "I can do that," that might be a good direction to stretch toward. If you pick up an extra project here and there because people tend to come to you for help or advice, you might be on the verge of stretching.

Watch for opportunities, and be willing to move when it makes sense to do so. Remember, there is nothing as rewarding as a good long stretch after a nap.

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