

Timing, Transitions, and Careers

Timing, in the abstract, does not carry high priority on the list of issues and challenges facing IT professionals on a daily basis. However, whenever the time comes, for whatever it is that the time has come, timing suddenly becomes paramount.

Timing is relative, largely determined by culture, by convictions, and indeed by time itself. *Time, timing, tempo, trajectory, transition, transformation*—such words often conjure up feelings of testiness, temptation, tension, even terror. It is time to reflect on our notions of timing—and the interplay with transitions and careers.

Patience and pacing are critical aspects of timing. Early in a career, having the good sense and patience to endure in dues-paying mode allows the young IT professional to learn from the experience of making mistakes at the appropriate level. Being impatient to advance sometimes has the unanticipated consequence of positioning the inexperienced professional to blunder into mistakes that should have been made at a lower level. Time in place also allows one to lead from where one is, irrespective of the formal organization chart. Acquiring the ability to quickly and astutely identify opportunities for facilitating systemic change can begin early in a career. “Leading from where you are” also affords occasions for one’s potential to be noticed and

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noted. Taking responsibility for grooming, and positioning, oneself to succeed later in strategic IT leadership roles is an early expression of professional identity.

By midcareer, we have established an identity around the work we do. Perhaps because of this internalization of our work, we sometimes need to be jolted into recognizing that it is time to examine, or reexamine, our convictions. For example, IT professionals are being called on now “to be partners in addressing campus issues, not just campus IT issues. . . . Our profession has evolved and our experience has deepened. It is time to engage in higher education’s grand challenges.”¹ The

mandate to break out of the technology cocoon portends a new reality for IT professionals. This is a time to seek guidance and good counsel through one’s professional associations.

Balance is a dimension of timing that applies to all phases of a career. Play helps to preserve balance by refreshing our perspective, so that we are able to recognize opportunities and to visualize new futures. As we progress through our careers, pressures build and time becomes scarce. For some of us, play is a learned skill. We have to work at developing and maintaining the ability to play. It is a professional mistake to use time constraints as an excuse for not gaining and retaining the ability to play.

Then, just as we are beginning to enjoy the benefits of balance and to savor the delicious fruits of experience, the time comes to contemplate retirement. Experience diminishes fear and reveals the unanticipated enrichment conferred by embracing or lurching into the previously unknown. Retirement forces one to learn a new art—that of “letting go.” We have a professional responsibility to make way for the next generation. To do so gracefully means again changing the balance of one’s life, this time shifting the focus from work and becoming more emotionally and intellectually engaged with one’s family and community—while also continuing to play.

Thus, I end on a personal note. The Hawaiian phrase *pau hana* celebrates the transition from work to play. It is a value statement that connotes the importance of the time *after* work. Now is the time for me to celebrate *pau hana*. My work is finished.

Note

1. “A Message from the EDUCAUSE Executive Team,” *EDUCAUSE Review*, vol. 41, no. 3 (May/June 2006): 4, <<http://www.educause.edu/er/erm06/erm06312.asp>>.

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