

If You Can't Leave

By Rose Jonas, Ph.D.

As much as possible I want you to live your dream, and I will push you relentlessly in that direction. As much as I ballyhoo that path, I also know how difficult it is, and how impossible that can seem from different vantage points in our lives. You may indeed feel a passionate desire to go for what you want AND be constrained by today's reality. What should you do if you CAN'T leave your job?

It often comes down to one of three things: (1) It would take you away from your family or alter their lives in ways you don't believe is fair; (2) You're making money you need and just can't see across that five-year chasm of unpredictability to risk it; (3) You don't have the courage to make the move now.

You're right. You CAN'T go. Too much is at stake; the dream isn't as compelling as you thought; the timing is wrong. If that's your feeling, then it's also your truth. Honor it. Stay.

But. . .

What often happens at this impasse is the dreamer begins to "Yes, but. . ." the decision. Unwilling to embrace the harsh practicality, and usually trying to make people believe he really does want the dream everyone says you're supposed to pursue, he stays miserable in the present and acts as if what he'd really rather be doing is the dream. Now THERE'S a set-up for relentless misery. Forget it. Put the dream down. Live your life as if you agree with the decision you've made.

Yes, but what do you do with the unhappiness in your current state? First, dive headfirst into that decision and own it. Embrace the family you sidestepped your dream for. Look for ways to be more useful in a job that's lost its zing. Go get another job like it if you just can't stand the place. Next, look for ways to make your life happy in place. Can you find chunks of your dream you can pursue now? Be an EMT if you can't go to medical school. Take a cooking class if you can't ditch the family and go to the Culinary Institute of America. Work on a master's in human resource management if you can't chuck it all to be a recruiter. You want to be a novelist but can't escape to a cabin to dance with your muse. You can, however, write for an hour after the kids go to bed.

But, keep the dream alive. If your kids will be in college five years from now and you'll be freer, maybe you should be saving money for your own education. Keep yourself in the field, meeting people who may later be teachers or helpers. Keep planning and figuring. Don't cast your dream into the chasm of despair and bitterness. Another harsh reality is that this is what you chose. Be content with your choice. Look for other ways to grow. See what you can do in the moment to keep the dream alive and to be doing things now that can later make it come true.

Do you see the point? Decide to stay and let go of the dream as gnawer at your tummy. Make yourself happy in place. It isn't any one else's fault that you made this decision. But keep the dream alive; see if there isn't a way to work at it each day.

Until you have the "get out of my way" feeling in your gut for these risky heart-objectives, you're not ready. Deal with it and make your life happy.