

## Square Peg, Round Hole

Not a good fit. Like a salmon swimming upstream. Pushing a horse uphill. All of these quips are descriptive of uncomfortable and challenging situations in work life. At what point does one get tired of swimming or pushing; evaluating the costs of continuing in a work environment that is toxic and not set up for success? For professionals who have had the great fortune of having years of success, either as an individual contributor or as a leader of others, finding themselves in this “square peg, round hole” situation can be unsettling and life changing.

I recently visited with a mid-career professional who found himself in this very situation. A star grad student and a top performer in all previous professional roles, it was a hard pill for him to swallow to realize he found himself in a situation where he could not get his footing and, once again, claim success. So, what was he to do? Ultimately, he had to admit to himself that this was not the job for him while at the same time focusing on doing the best he could possibly do within the confines of the toxic environment in which he found himself.

Digging deep into the realities of the day to day at work, with consideration for the people involved in his day to day - those he was fortunate to be leading, and those that were “leading” him - he realized that this was not the job for him. By nature he was not a quitter and, he confessed, being overly loyal to an organization and to people who are not deserving of loyalty, is a shortcoming of his. However, existing in a toxic work environment wreaks havoc on one’s self confidence - messes with one’s “mojo” as I like to say. This shaking of his self confidence ultimately impacted how he responded to the work environment and proved to be the greatest self-awareness learning experience he had ever had. One can read articles in professional publications about becoming self-aware, but until one goes through the fire of real life “corporate America”, growing into a more mature, self-aware leader can not really manifest itself deeply into one’s leadership soul.

So, here is my advice for those who find themselves in a similar situation. Get out - it’s best for you and best for your organization. Embrace what you have learned, make impact where possible, respect yourself enough to face the reality that not every job is a good job for you and move to something that aligns with your leadership soul. Leverage your external professional network to begin the transition into what your next chapter will be and be honest with yourself about what puts a smile on your face - what fills your cup professionally and how your next chapter will align with your life goals. If you have a “truth teller” in your life - one that will be honest with you about your strengths and weaknesses - lean on that person heavily to help guide you through the transition. And, finally, get out of your own way. ***Surrender to that voice inside that is telling you to go for it!***