

COACHING *for* LEADERS

Let Go: How to Transform Moments of Panic into a Life of Profits and Purpose

by Pat Flynn

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Dave's Reading Highlights

I was on somebody else's path for a long time, and it wasn't until I got laid off that I finally became conscious of the fact that I could choose my own path. I promise you that if you become conscious of what's holding you back, you can do the same—no layoff necessary.

The next day at around 3:00 in the afternoon, I received a call from John McNulty, principal at MBH Architects. The day after that, I went in for an interview and was hired on the spot as an entry-level drafter in the restaurant division of the firm. Mind blown.

Sixty to seventy hours a week was normal; eighty to one hundred was commonplace when there was a deadline. I loved every minute of it. I must have made an impression because after a year I was promoted . . . to senior drafter. I was still a drafter; I was just . . . senior, I guess. The paycheck I earned every fifteen days finally crept above \$1,000, but I was still staring lifelessly at my computer all day. I could feel my eyes going bad and posture getting stressed. And I continued to have no influence on design. Worse, I was now the guy who people could blame if something in the drawings was wrong. Looking up at the ladder, Job Captain was the next rung on the climb to the top. Promoting anyone with less than four or five years' experience to

Job Captain was unheard of, especially when that someone had little to no experience in the field. I wasn't going to let that stop me from trying, though, so I decided to add more to my plate.

On March 8, 2008, after six months of studying hardcore for two to three hours a day, I passed the exam and became a LEED Accredited Professional, one of the few LEED APs in the entire firm. A month later, I was promoted to Job Captain, one of the youngest people in the firm to ever become one. My salary nearly doubled to \$60,000 per year. I couldn't have been more pumped. On March 31, 2008, I proposed to my girlfriend, April. She said yes. Life was good.

Firms throughout the nation began cutting staff in droves. Even world-famous firms like Gehry Partners and Gensler were laying off people by the truckload just to stay afloat. For a lesser-known company like ours, the outlook was not good. By May, over a hundred people in our firm were no longer employed. We called it getting "slayed off" because it was more than just losing a job; it felt like murder. I'd come into the office the next day and find more desks clear of objects and more seats clear of occupants. I still remember what it was like seeing them there. Even people who had been working for the firm for over a decade were being laid off.

I sat down, but I didn't say a word. I was just there to hear the verdict. Nothing I could say or do now would change it. "Pat, you're one of the youngest, brightest minds we have in this entire firm . . ." A glimpse of hope. "But unfortunately . . ." Nevermind. "As you know, things have been rough, and we've tried to keep you as long as possible. At this point, we have no choice but to let you go. I'm sorry." Me too.

My first move was to try to get a job at another architecture firm. I was a Job Captain willing to take an entry-level position if I had to, anything just to survive. As soon as I got back to my desk, I spent an hour calling fifteen different firms to see if there were any positions available. Nothing. Next, I called almost every construction and engineering firm that our company had worked with in the past. Again, nothing.

Unfortunately for me, our parents lived in San Diego, eighty miles south of my temporary position in Irvine. Telecommuting was not an option, so I was looking at an hour and a half commute each way. With gas prices at an all-time high (nearly \$5 per gallon in some areas of Southern California), taking the train instead made more economical sense. Two hours to work in the morning, and then two hours back at night.

I didn't know anything about how to start a business, let alone one that was online. My only experience with making any sort of money online was from selling Magic: The Gathering cards on eBay. This whole "make a living online" thing always seemed a little shady to me, but the IBM Podcast was showing me a different light. Besides the motivating commentary by hosts Jeremy and Jay and the incredible number of tips that didn't make sense to me at the time, the podcast occasionally featured success stories from their community of listeners.

The next day, I woke up to an unbelievable surprise. At 4:45 in the morning I checked my stats and it showed me that 5,158 people had visited my site the day before. That couldn't be right. No way. I quadruple-checked. I thought maybe that was how many times I had visited the site on my own prior to that day when I was studying, but all of those hits registered the day before, and from over fifty countries around the world.

Then someone followed up with, "How much traffic do you get to your site?" "It depends," I replied. "Sometimes six or seven thousand visits." "A month?" "A day." They all looked stunned. Then Jeremy with eyes wide open said, "Pat! You have to write and sell an ebook on your site!" Everyone else agreed with excitement. I wanted to be excited too, but the only thing that I could think was, "What's an ebook?"

That day, at the office while doing nothing, I thought long and hard about what my dad said. He was totally right, but going back to school didn't feel right for me. I'd worked my butt off since middle

school to make sure I got the best grades. I'd joined clubs and volunteered several hours just so it would look good on my record. I'd followed the path exactly as outlined by society only to be kicked off. And here I was thinking about trying to get back on? No.

I made a total of ten sales for \$199.90 that day, which was more money than I had ever earned in a single day working in an architecture firm. It was the start of a new life.

Most people worry when life doesn't go 100 percent according to plan. Instead, you should worry when it does. Plans are good and necessary to have, but they shouldn't be written in stone. Be open to and welcoming of unforeseen events, because those unplanned moments are often the seeds of spectacular opportunities in your life.

Then my boss cut to the chase. "Pat, the main reason I called is because I want you to come back and work for me. I have a spot for you in the new office and you can start as soon as you can get up here. I'll start you at your Job Captain salary and even pay for your move from wherever you're located now." It didn't take me long to reply. "Thanks, but no thanks. I'm doing pretty well now, but thank you for your offer." It was the most satisfying "no" I've ever said in my life.

Time, even more than traffic and money, is the most important metric to monitor. Traffic numbers will go up and down, and you can always lose money and make more money. But once time is gone, it's gone.

A CEO learns to let go of stories that might not be true and focus on the data.

A CEO learns to let go of what's just ahead—or in the rearview mirror—and focus on what's coming way down the road.

A CEO learns to let go of the work he or she may want to do but doesn't need to do.

As you may know, I believe strongly in diversifying income sources, for a couple of reasons. First, if any one of my current businesses or income streams were to disappear tomorrow, I'd still have a generous income from the others streams to provide for my family. Plus, I know that even if everything were to disappear tomorrow, I have the skills and experience at creating a lot of different income streams to quickly bounce back and succeed again. When it comes to internet business, change is a constant. Diversifying your income sources means responding and adapting to that change—creating new forms of income when new opportunities arise, and having the flexibility to let go of ones that might have been viable once but aren't anymore.