



TO W.I.T: THE NEWSLETTER FOR WOMEN IN TRANSITION

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"WIT"icisms

"Non! Rien de rien... Non! Je ne regrette rien...Je repars à zéro..."

"No! Nothing at all...No! I regret nothing at all...I am starting again from zero"

From the song ..."Je ne regrette rien"...performed by the legendary Edith Piaf

TABULA RASA

By Janet Ruck

Have you ever sat down to write a letter and been overwhelmed by the blank page? It can happen whether you are writing in longhand or staring at the blank screen of your computer monitor. It is the fear of "tabula rasa," the blank slate.

Why does possibility create a reaction of fear? What are you really afraid of? Of taking action? Making a mistake? Being successful? Your own truth? Fear perpetuates itself, and giving in to the fear maintains a state of immobilization. To free yourself of this fright requires a different kind of action than the one that created it. Writers who experience "writer's block" are advised to just begin writing anything, to eradicate the blank page. Take some action, even if it is just writing: "I have nothing to say." Somehow, putting the first word on the page sets up future actions that result in writing a whole page.

Do you remember your English teacher telling you that writing a story involves writing three paragraphs? It requires that you write an opening, a middle and a close. In the opening paragraph, you set the stage for what is to follow. You provide a "hook" so that your reader wants to continue to read and is given an idea of what to expect. The middle provides the content, the information, the action that makes up the primary basis of your story. Finally, the close is the paragraph in which you tie everything up, leaving the reader satisfied and pleased with his or her choice to continue reading.

I see the similarity between writing a paragraph and living my life. The life that I began to develop set the stage for my introduction. I was given the tools and the information that would prepare me for where I needed to go. While I did not hold the pen myself, I felt the guiding hand of others moving my pen across the

blank page. What resulted were words dictated by strong influences of my life. Although it was my handwriting upon which I was graded, I could not take true credit for the words that were imprinted on the page. During the middle paragraph of my life, I added the substance that I wanted for myself. This involved the choices of profession, education, partner, whether to have children, and other aspects of a life that gave me ownership. However, it is the closing paragraph over which I feel I have true authorship. This is the period of my life that I have entered now as I become clear about who I am, what I want, and where I am going. With the information I gathered during the first and second paragraphs, I feel like I have developed a better idea of what I want this final chapter to look like. This truly is tabula rasa, because it is a period of life over which I feel like I have the most control. The choices are mine to make each and every day. These are the choices that determine how the rest of my life is spent, with daily reflection upon my vision. I feel a sense of exhilaration where I once felt trepidation at the enormity of responsibility that comes with choice.

At this point, as I stare at the blank slate that is the chapter I am about to write with my own pen, in my own handwriting and with my own words, I am guided by the words of Lisa Nichols, coauthor of Chicken Soup for the African-American Soul: “You are the designer of your destiny. You are the author. You write the story. The pen is in your hand, and the outcome is whatever you choose.” Perhaps this has been true all along. But, now I embrace it. It is my time to look forward, not backward. And what works best for me is to look inward, not outward. Because all the answers are inside of me. This chapter comes from a work of non-fiction, written by me and for me. Anything that happens outside of me against which I compare myself unfavorably has shown itself to be the work of fiction it always was.

My final chapter is My Truth, and for that, I welcome this blank slate.

According to Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia, tabula rasa (scraped tablet or clean slate) refers to a theory which states that human beings are born with no innate content; their entire resource of knowledge is built up gradually from their experiences of the outside world. This, our last issue of To WIT: the online newsletter for Women in Transition, will unfold into the next phase of transition. That is the phase which takes us from absorbing the experiences from the outside world and instead relying upon the innate and internal voices that have been guiding us. Perhaps we have ignored the voices, perhaps we have feared them. But for many of us, turning away from these internal messengers has created conflict which may be reversed as we learn to trust ourselves. Often, this requires a total trust in and commitment to the blankness that has been flooded by the external. It is having confidence in the possibility that comes with letting go of the known.

As “Tabula Rasa: Your Blank Slate” takes hold in the future, we will encourage you to look within yourselves for answers to life’s questions. All of us are on our own personal journey, which often requires twists and turns down life’s pathways. Collisions and derailments may occur and we will look to others for support. Yet, it is up to each and every one of us to answer our own personal call which comes from within. We look forward to taking this journey with you.....

“All that we are is a result of what we have thought.”

Buddha
563-483 BC

From La Vida Loca to Tabula Rasa: 5 Simple Steps for Cleaning the Slate

By Kate Sanner

Life can get crazy just in the process of living and working...but even more so while you are in transition. If you are looking to wipe the slate clean in order to start over and rebuild, here are some areas to begin in and some strategies to get you started. Remember SIMPLE doesn't mean easy...some of these may be a challenge to implement.

1. **Your Time**—Examine your commitments and decide to let go of the ones that present a drain on your time. Clubs and organizations are wonderful social and networking outlets but they are also time absorbers. Determine which are the one or two that most support your goals and stick with those. If you find that you are being overwhelmed with information coming via email and mail, cancel/ don't renew subscriptions or request to be taken off the lists of those that are not crucial to your health, well-being or attaining your goals. It is possible to have too much of a good thing.
2. **Your Finances** - If your commitment is to create a financial clean slate, take the advice of financial advisors and planners (Martha Meehan's article in this issue gives you valuable and succinct information on doing so): find out where you stand and then have an expert help you plan your strategy. A quick strategy to start cleaning the financial slate is what I call "The Buying Moratorium". I have used this strategy for years in my psychotherapy practice with parents who are overwhelmed by their children's escalating demands whenever they are in a store. It applies to grown ups too. For one month, buy only what you need and don't buy anything you want (and be honest as to what constitutes a need vs. a want). It not only saves you money, it makes you realize where your money has been going and begins to break the cycle of consuming and acquiring.
3. **Your Well-Being**— It is important to our emotional and spiritual well-being to learn the value of silence. One of the simplest strategies I ever heard was to reserve 15 minutes a day to just sit in total silence. Close doors, turn off phones and lights...close your eyes and empty your mind. Or learn to meditate...there are many simple systems out there. The simplest form of meditation is to sit and follow your breath. Inhale slowly through your nose, counting silently in your mind to 10, then exhale slowly through pursed lips to a count of 10. Do this for ten minutes.
4. **Your Relationships with Others**— Are there negative people in your life...people who give you a litany of what you should not be doing, should be doing instead or interject doubt instead of support when you share your goals and dreams? This is what I call the "Cheerleader from He** Syndrome"... "You can't do that, you can't do that...just who do you think you are! Push you back, push you back...WAY BACK!!" Time to end the relationship or significantly decrease the time you spend with that person. Or are you holding on to a friendship that just doesn't work any longer? It was great once upon a time, but you've changed, she's changed (or hasn't) and the friendship just doesn't fit any more and in fact, it has become an obligation or burden. Time to lovingly let go.
5. **Your Relationship with Yourself** - As you clean the slate in preparation for your new life, believe in yourself even when it becomes difficult to do so. Commit - once and for all - to really letting go of old limiting beliefs. In order for things to be different, we need to believe and to act differently. Clean the slate and begin to write your new story on it.



WEALTH

A CLEAN (OR CLEANED UP) SLATE

Guest Contributor: Martha J. Meehan

Chances are if you are reading this article, you get “it” already. The it, or umbrella for this issue of Women in Transition, the subject if you will, is having a clean slate. Regardless of what transition you are in – personal transition, professional transition, family transition, health transition, life-stage transition - having and keeping a clean slate keeps us open to the gifts and opportunities of transitions. Are you shaking your head yes to any of these transitions - perhaps, all of these?

The fact is that as women, we are always in transition – we are even the transition managers for many others in our lives. Every transition has stages – much like grief – and emotions surrounding the stages of the changes. Buried behind the big to do lists and the big balancing act is navigating our every day life – the smaller to do lists that sit at the back of our brains and sometimes keep us stuck, agitated, off-balance and unable to fully realize the gifts of our transition(s).

I have learned in my financial planning practice as well as my experience with my own transitions, that managing our money is one of those things that sits at the back of our to do list and invariably falls to the “I’ll get to that when I have time” category. Whether it is fear of managing money, the false sense that it manages itself as long as I can pay the bills and do the next thing on the list, or the very real situation of never having had to take full responsibility for our financial health, I can tell you that money and transition often make very strange bedfellows and perpetuate “staying stuck”.

How do we address that or “fix it”? The first step is to put it in its rightful context. We must challenge our historical view of money and our relationship to it by taking the time to get our arms around it, fears and all. The best way I have found, and a way that I insist my women in transition clients start, is simple. We start with a financial inventory and house cleaning. That is – assessing what is where, having a handle on that through a financial organizing and filing system (get in touch with me – I’ll send you one!) and then – only after that process, which I call Cleaning Up the Slate – can we let go of that agonizing feeling that our money is not in order and we don’t have control of it so it’s just a thing that will stay in stuck mode forever.

Cleaning up this slate is very, very empowering. More often than not, what we discover in the process is that putting the financial house in order reveals surprises – really good surprises. Knowing where you stand financially – really knowing – is a critical step to realizing dreams and allowing for possibilities.

Gather up one month’s worth of statements – bills, retirement accounts, bank statements, insurance statements, investment accounts, etc. – every piece of paper you have received in the last month that relates to money – including expenses like grocery receipts, gift purchases. Then gather up all of the statements and receipts that you only receive quarterly. Then find your most recent tax return and life and health insurance policies. Once you have done that – make the call – to a financial advisor. Make an appointment. If you are asked what you are trying to do or why you want an appointment simply tell them – I am a woman in transition and I am getting my financial slate cleaned up. If they ask you what you mean by that – call a different advisor. If they tell you they are happy to work with you on that process and support your efforts to do so – make the appointment and proceed with confidence and a clean slate.

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BOOK REVIEW by Julie Williamson of A Good Book The Secret By Rhonda Byrne

When starting over in life you not only have to do away with old habits but you must also alter your way of thinking so that you can allow positive changes to take place in your life. To be in control of where life is taking you means being more productive, dealing more effectively with stress, having the ability to solve problems, handling change and developing positive thinking.

While venturing into a new business opportunity an associate introduced me to a DVD and book called *The Secret*. Rhonda Byrne, the Australian author of *The Secret* introduces the book by admitting, "A year ago my life had collapsed around me" (p. ix). While searching for answers in many books, she began to investigate what she believed was common in all of them. She called it the "Great Secret---The Secret to Life" (p. ix).

The basis of *The Secret* is "the law of attraction." What you think about you attract. Rhonda Byrne puts this law of attraction in a form the majority of us can understand. According to Byrne and the many co-contributors, everything in the Universe vibrates on a particular frequency. When you are in sync with the frequency of something, it's magnetized to you. If you think about wealth, you will receive wealth. However, if you think about your debt, you will receive more debt. You draw towards you what you think about; your thoughts determine your future.

The author reinforces the law of attraction in several ways: "Nothing (good or bad) can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts" (p. 28). "Your thoughts are the primary cause of everything" (p. 33). "Your current reality of your current life is a result of the thoughts you have been thinking" (p. 71). This book is described as the secret to unlimited joy, health, money, relationships, love, youth...everything you have ever wanted.

Used in the right way this can be powerful life changing information. Some of the customers who have purchased *The Secret* have shared their experiences with me. It's helped one person follow their dreams of starting a business; another through a failed marriage; another to get respect and due acknowledgement in the workplace; and others just share how it has changed their attitudes towards life.

At some point in our lives we all go through personal setbacks and failures never knowing how to start again and get back on the right track. However, the only person who can stop you from moving forward is you. Regardless of how much you've been through you can start fresh and live a healthy and joyful life by sustaining positive feelings, thoughts and words.

Five Ways to Start Positive Thinking:

Use your thoughts to visualize how you see your future, experiencing it as if it has already taken place.

Feel confident that you are worthy to have the things you want and deserve.

Don't hesitate to act on an opportunity or impulse that complements what you want.

Stop blaming others for your shortcomings.

Stop talking about what you don't want or about what you don't like and instead do the opposite.

Julie Williamson, Owner of A Good Book

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EMBRACING WHAT YOU DREAD

BY Pamela Armstrong, Ph.D.

My parents grew up in the harsh world of Depression-era Texas and Oklahoma. Their survival at times hinged on matters of less than a one-dollar bill. I know this because my mother saved all their love letters written prior to their marriage. Only later did I put together all the historical context of what shaped them—the extremes of the massive flu epidemic, the Dust Bowl and the difficult lives of their own parents who had moved west.

I was born just as World War II was ending. My parents had both worked to pay for college, and employment for women was “iffy” at best. Dad tried for a job as an inspector for the Department of Agriculture, and they followed the opportunity that was available, settling in a small Tennessee town. A few years later Mom returned to work as a teacher.

I grew into a child of the 1950’s and early 1960’s, as a part of the first wave of “baby boomers” to come along after the war. My parents continued to do everything they had always done to save on the basics—growing much of our food in a large garden; sewing our clothes, etc. The message they gave to my older sister and me was “You can do anything that you decide to do.” She and I both saw education as the way to become validated and have a serious career in a world where college was described as a place where girls go to find a husband.

I pursued a path which I can only say was out of pure intuition on my part. When asked about my college major as a 17 year old freshman, I said “psychology”. I can only say that the answer came from my inner mind, because I knew no psychologists. I had seen portrayals of people who were in therapy or who definitely needed therapy in certain shocking movies of that era, like “Psycho” and “Splendor in the Grass”. I also knew that I was confident in some areas but extremely shy in others.

My path eventually led me to the Washington, D.C. area where I completed my final degrees and started my work life. I realized at many points along the way during my coursework and my supervised training that I was forced to face everything I feared and dreaded. If I was not willing to walk through the fear and dread, I would become pretty useless to those I was trying to help.

I persevered through serious obstacles, including some very toxic people in authority positions I had to cope with along the way. But I must say I also had great luck in getting support and salvaging situations. I had to grow personally, and I had to let down my carefully constructed walls in order to grow.



I attended many personal growth events because I somehow knew my life was a quest, and that most of the quest was about how to deal with things inside myself. I would open up at these events, but I would close up soon after they were over. In this way, I was keeping myself the same. I used my experiences almost like a file box of recipes with my clients, but I walled myself off from close friendships. I needed friendships where I could tell on myself (the fearful, dreading part of me) and challenge myself to stay open and commit to living “on the fringe of fear” (as one workshop described it).

I attended the same type of ropes course that Kate Sanner described in her recent article. I learned that I did not trust others very well, and that I hated putting myself at risk physically (rappelling down a high cliff using a harness rigged by somebody else). At the very precipice where I had to start descending, there was a 20-something girl ordering me to release the rope I had tightly held in my left hand. If I didn't release my grip on the rope, I would stay suspended there. I learned that the precipice was the “sticking point” in life, and that it was fun once I started following directions. I also learned that it is vital to VISUALIZE GETTING TO THE OTHER SIDE of whatever the obstacle is. I saw that other people would be happy for my success.

However, when I came back to my usual routines, I caved in and started to hide again. If something new is to happen, I know now that I have to LEAD MYSELF as if I was at the precipice of each new situation. There is a primitive reaction we all have to feeling punched in the stomach—that is, we curl up, we pull back, and we protect from the next blow. If I can breathe after the first punch, I can still think. If I can lead myself to walk into the possibility of the next blow with my head up and my visualization positive, I will have momentum. I also will be able to LEAD OTHERS better because I will not be hiding—I will be open about being vulnerable along with them. In this way, I will not be abandoning my own spirit, and I definitely will not be walking alone.

Pamela Armstrong, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist who has worked with children and adolescents and their families in public clinics since 1981. She has a private practice in Elkridge, MD where she sees adults and young adults for career and college coaching. She also provides individuals and couples therapy.

She is a certified Kolbe ® consultant.



Pamela's website is at www.relationshiprenewalcenter.com

She is also constructing a website at www.instinctivecoach.com

Baby Boomer Women: How to Transition Through Life's Changes

By Marcia Merrill

Navigating transitions in later life can be confusing, overwhelming and frightening. Read this article to learn more about the process of transition, turning confused into calm, muddle into momentum and scared into success.

This is a time in your life when major changes are taking place and your life is adjusting as a result. Changes may be related to the relationships in your life, to your surroundings, to your work life, or to your health - physical, mental and emotional.

Some common life changes that lead you into a time of transition are separation from a life partner through divorce or death, relocation, a change in your job or new health issues.

Changes happen in our life both as the result of choice and as the result of circumstance. Sometimes you're in charge of making the change (e.g. leaving your job to start your own business) and sometimes the change happens to you (e.g. being downsized or fired from your job).

Transitions are usually easier when we feel that we're in control of them – that we've chosen them. But any type of change will evoke some or all of these feelings of anxiety, excitement, fear, foreboding and uncertainty.

When we're in transition, it helps to know that the period of uncertainty will pass and we WILL feel our feet on solid ground again. What was new will become familiar. In order to get to that stage of familiarity, each time we go through a transition we need to experience it fully, which means passing through the three distinct phases of the transition cycle.

There's no set timetable for how long this will take, and there's no "skipping" through a phase, each must be experienced fully in order for you to pass through to the next.

Phase One – Catalyst

In phase one, you're actually experiencing the change. Something has happened to you or you have made a decision and put it into action.

In the catalyst phase, you may feel lost and worried about something that happened. If it's a change that you've instigated, you may feel confused about whether you made the right decision. You may question everything from your identity to your purpose in life.

The most important thing to do during this phase is to find safe ways to express your thoughts and feelings. One helpful exercise is to write a letter to the person or institution that you think is responsible for this change. Vent your feelings until they've all been expressed and released. And then tear up the letter.

Phase Two – Cocooning

Phase two is a "time out" – a seemingly unproductive phase that nevertheless has a very important role in the cycle.

This is time for you to process what's happened and reflect on your life; for you to let go of and grieve for the past, get grounded and centered in the present and plan for the future.

The most important thing to do during this phase is to allow yourself to retreat – either a formal getaway or simply a period of time that you leave free and unscheduled.

Self-care is also really important in this phase. Be very kind to yourself, letting go of any tendency to self-criticize or place unrealistic demands on yourself. Nourish your mind, body and soul with pleasurable activities that feel good and are enjoyable to you.

Phase Three – Commencement

The last phase, commencement, is really a new beginning. It's time for you to embrace new things, embark on new ventures and live life anew.

You'll know when you've hit this phase because ideas and possibilities will start flowing through your mind. Your biggest challenge is choosing ONE action to start with.

The most important thing to do during this phase is to build and make use of a strong support network. The right support structure can provide you with positive role models and gentle accountability to stay on track. Most importantly, make sure you have someone to celebrate with.

Transitions are rarely wrapped neatly up in individual packages. Often life is a series of transitions, and just as we've entered the commencement phase of one transition, we're facing a life change in another area of our life.

The best news is that once you're familiar with the transition cycle, you'll be able to recognize just where you are and just what you need to do in order to successfully navigate through the transition.



Marcia Merrill
The Transition Chick!

Marcia Merrill is a Life Transitions/Career Coach with 18+ years' experience. She holds two Masters Degrees (Counseling Psychology & Education) and completed coaching training at the Adult Development Network. She is also credentialed as a Certified Career Management Coach by the Career Coach Academy. Visit www.eCareerCorner.com to learn about your own "Transition Position" and to book your FREE 25-minute consultation with Marcia to discuss the changes happening in your own life.

Health and Wellness- Where Does One Start to Become Nutritionally Well?

By Kathy McMillan, MS, CNW, RMT—Nutritional Wellness Consultant and Reiki Master

We've all been told that to be healthy we need only to eat healthy, take lots of vitamins and exercise. Oh, yes...now they tell us to get rid of stress also. But just how does one go about accomplishing these? Why can't we seem to stick to any diet or exercise plan? Why is it so hard to change our undesirable habits we've created? Isn't there a magic pill we can take to make us healthy and keep us healthy?

Well, like many of you, I've experienced these same problems. I've been on many a diet, lost hundreds of pounds, gained hundreds of pounds, felt energized one day and then totally exhausted the next, physically and mentally. My health seemed to falter from one extreme to the next. Symptoms of disease became the norm. That's why I started studying nutrition...to find out the answers to all these questions and to get myself healthy.

What I found out is this: *There is no one diet or exercise plan that's right for everyone!* Just as each of us has individual fingerprints, so are our bodies unique.

So with the help of a team of doctors, scientists and nutritionists, I found out that it is now possible to identify an individual's nutritional BioType™ allowing to determine a person's individual genetic breakdown and recommend the foods and supplements matched to their biochemical needs in order for them to feel better, prevent illness and enhance their health, vitality and youthfulness. This is a great accomplishment but still not the end to my quest.

I also came to realize that most metabolic systems may not be functioning at their best efficiency, even with *optimal* vitamin and mineral supplements because of several influences of our environmental lifestyle of which some we have no control over. So nutrition alone was not the answer to becoming well. But it was a good starting point.

Once the person is eating and moving healthy, it is then necessary to look at the various other needs such as self-responsibility, breathing, sensing, feeling, communicating, playing and working, thinking, sex, finding meaning and transcending. All twelve areas of the whole self need balancing. By taking a Wellness Inventory assessment one can see where they are out of balance and take responsible steps to bring their body and lives back into balance. This is when the diet sticks!! This is when health becomes steady!! *This is the magic pill!*

The Wellness Inventory is an assessment and life-balancing program designed to help you gain personal insight into your state of physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness. The program offers guidance and tools to transform this new awareness into lasting changes in your life, and a renewed sense of health and wellbeing.

You can learn how to take responsibility for your own health with awareness, education and growth through the Wellness Inventory. Combined with a personalized nutritional plan you can accomplish total wellness.

My Nutritional Wellness Program provides a personalized nutritional assessment, individualized supplements and a wellness inventory, along with gentle guidance and coaching.

Kathy McMillan (443) 745-2403 or email mkmcmillan@comcast.net

Recommended Websites and Books

www.eCareerCorner.com

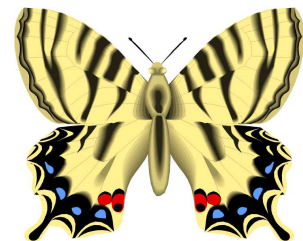
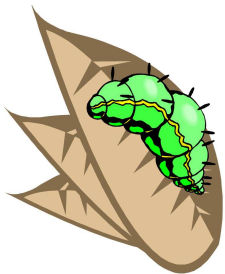
www.agoodbook.biz

www.relationshiprenewalcenter.com

<http://www.vivacitynow.com>

Writing to Change the World by Mary Pipher, Riverhead Books, 2006

TRANSITION





SELF-NURTURING TIP:

Allow yourself the gift of starting over. It really never is too late.



Ms. Betty, The Goddess of Workplace Bliss

Dear Ms. Betty:

I am so overwhelmed with everything I need to get done every day. Do you have any tips to help someone like me?

Signed,

Can't Keep It Straight

Dear Straight,

Home, work, exercise, shopping – how's a gal to keep it straight and keep her sanity? I have discovered a secret which I'd be happy to share with you – the power of writing a list. Now, I'll be the first to tell you that when I resort to list-making, I know I'm overextended. A list for me is a symptom, not a tool. Oh, sure, we all know those Type A folks for whom list-making keeps them focused and on track. Haven't you even known people who add tasks to a list after they've completed them? Yes, a list for many of us is a time-saving, life-simplifying device. Not for me. For me, a list is a cry for help, a symptom that I've taken on too much, gone over the edge, and I need to slow down.

I recognize the problem as it emerges. Clean sheets of paper – tabula rasa- beckon me like beacons to inscribe them with tasks and chores. I resist the urge to mar them with the mundane:

1. Call vet
2. Reschedule dentist
3. Rewrite proposal
4. Rehearse speech

Finally, when the tasks become too numerous to track in my mind, my quivering hand reaches for (preferably) a black felt tip fine point and the list making begins in earnest. I write feverishly, without stopping, until I have before me a long list of tasks I must complete to succeed this day.

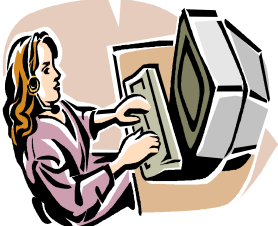
In my younger years, my days flowed one to the other without the intrusion of words to enumerate my errands. Life was just life, sans the documentation of duties. Somehow everything got done. Sure, you can say that with increased responsibility come complications. Perhaps list-making sorts through it all, resulting in a manageable elucidation of expectations. Plain and simple, sort and sweet, when I've succumbed to the urge to make a list, when my life has become so complicated and task-abundant that keeping track becomes a necessity, I know that I've gone too far, and I'm over the edge and over-extended.

Excuse me, I feel a list bubbling up. Tabula rasa? Not today! Not for me. I'm not quite there yet.

Signed,

Ms. Betty, The Goddess of Workplace Bliss

Write to Ms. Betty, the Goddess of Workplace Bliss, at janetruck@yahoo.com, for answers to your workplace struggles.



We need your feedback!! Email us and let us know what you think of the newsletter and what you want to hear about in upcoming newsletters! Email us at : kate@vivacitynow.com.

CREATORS OF "TO W.I.T."

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Final Edition

Thank you to all of our readers. We look forward to bringing you "Tabula Rasa: Your Blank Slate"

