“I won’t hear the waves of the West Coast, and I’ve had to say goodbye to Trader Joe’s cinnamon buns, but this pivot has brought me closer to family, which feels like the right choice for me, now, in this moment.”

I can’t hear the word pivot without hearing echoes of Ross screaming at Rachel in a hallway, “Pivot, pivot, pivot!”

Much like trying to drag a giant couch up a Brooklyn stairway, pivoting in a pandemic has proved every bit as stressful.

Okay, so we weren’t looking to bring home the perfect couch, but we were looking to bring home our perfect career. We’d diligently done our shopping at networking events throughout the semester. We’d scoured the catalogue and circled the positions that we most wanted. We thought about whether the job would be comfy. Would it be stylish? Would it fit with the growing vision of ourselves? Did it need to accommodate a growing family? Did we, like Ross, seek advice from our ex-partners? We had nailed down the precise job spec we wanted, and if we hadn’t, we at least had a pretty good sense of what we were aiming for.

Five months on from the moment we left Appian Way, many of us still find ourselves in a cramped metaphorical stairwell holding a couch that, despite our best efforts, won’t budge. We’ve pushed, pulled, sweated and stalled — yet we are no closer to landing that dream job (or any job!). The call to “Pivot” has attacked us loudly from all manner of well-meaning directions. Parents, professors, siblings, and careers counsellors have all been shouting “Pivot!” and this cacophony of advice, sometimes confusing, sometimes contradictory, has done little to lift the weight of the sofa.

Spoiler alert: At the end of the Friends episode, Ross unceremoniously returns his couch to the store. It’s ripped in half and, no, the store won’t do a refund.

My personal pivot has had its challenging moments. My applications to high schools in Oakland were left unanswered by this new form of career ghosting to which many of us are now well acquainted. (It’s worse than dating.) Staying in the United States began to feel increasingly complicated by the president’s sporadic visa tweets. What’s more, the difficulties of navigating health insurance without a stable job began to feel insurmountable. (As a Brit, my deep love for the NHS has never been greater.)

I’ve subsequently pivoted to a school leadership role back in the UK, where I get to work for a phenomenal head teacher at a turnaround school in Enfield, North London. I won’t hear the waves of the West Coast, and I’ve had to say goodbye to Trader Joe’s cinnamon buns, but this pivot has
brought me closer to family, which feels like the right choice for me, now, in this moment.

Over summer, I’ve picked up some consultancy projects, which I’ve been working on from my childhood bedroom in my parents’ house in the English countryside. Now I have to navigate two distinctly different identities on a daily basis. One: put-together millennial woman killing it on conference calls. The other: my sixteen-year-old angsty teenage self to whom I seem to revert to whenever I visit my parents. On Day Two of working from home, my dad kindly asked if I needed a lift anywhere for my meetings. I politely declined while laughing at the idea that the Liberian education minister would arrive in my village mid-pandemic! On Day Three, my mum slipped a hand-drawn takeaway menu in front of me while I was on a Zoom call to ask what I fancied for dinner. Her beautiful act of kindness threatened my ability to maintain separation between my distinct identities of both professional and child. Throughout the summer, I’ve been wearing a shirt on top and yoga leggings on the bottom, a physical manifestation of the different identities I am holding during this weird time.

My life is now punctuated by long dog walks, no mobile phone signal, and the fish and chip van that comes to the village every Wednesday night. This is not the post-Harvard catalogue life I had dreamed for myself, but I must admit that, despite the "PIVOT!" I’m quietly content.

Note: I write from the ludicrously privileged position of being healthy and having no family directly affected by the virus.

**FELICITY BURGESS** is a school leader committed to transforming Britain’s schools by transforming the way we think about teaching and learning in the 21st century. She is passionate about building organizational cultures grounded in equity and scaling practices and systems that allow students from all backgrounds to thrive. Look out for her future school! She has designed and led professional development in Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Nepal, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. She can most easily be found in cozy cafes, where she will be lost in the pages of a book that she will eagerly recommend to you, warming her fingers with a cup of Earl Grey tea.

“**It matters to show up and be there for our youth in a real and personal way.**”

**Jodi Rosenbaum, Ed.M.’02**

**FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

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