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Weekly Words of Wellness
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The Living Compass Wellness Initiative
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"Mud Season"

I attended a wonderful training workshop this past week that focused on helping people and organizations move through times of transition and change. Dr. Kay Collier McLaughlin, a psychotherapist and leadership/organizational consultant, was our presenter and drew heavily on her many years of experience in both fields. What struck me most about this excellent presentation was her observation that the biggest mistake people and organizations make when working through significant change is that they don't make enough room to honor the emotions of loss, sadness, grief, and fear that almost always accompany change. Someone in our group observed that we don't like to make room for these kinds of emotions because they can be so "messy" and for the most part we don't like things that are messy or unpleasant.

Here in the Midwest we know something about messy this time of year. As the long winter begins to lose its grip and the mounds of snow begin to melt, our roads, sidewalks, trails, and yards become quite messy and even ugly. In fact, I have heard it said here in the Midwest, as well as many other places in the country, that there are actually five seasons each year if you add the "mud season" that exists between winter and spring.

Part of what creates the massive amount of mud and messiness this time of year is the fact that after a long, cold winter the depth of the ground freeze is quite significant. During the mud season, while the warming temperatures thaw the surface of the ground, the deeper ground remains frozen and thus the melting water at the surface is unable to percolate down into the soil. Until the deeper ground thaws the water stays on the surface creating increasingly deeper levels of mud and mess. Many dirt roads and walking trails actually become impassable during this time of year until the deeper thaw finally occurs, allowing the water to seep down into the soil and then to flow on into the greater watershed.

The mud season, itself a time of transition between winter and spring, strikes me as a powerful metaphor for describing what it feels like when we are going through times of transition in our lives, whether as individuals, families, or organizations. Times of transition are almost always at least a little messy, and the path forward can sometimes become muddy and hard to travel. If there is significant grief or loss involved in our transition, the initial thawing can feel particularly muddy and difficult.

Whatever kind of mud season we may be experiencing, the way through is the same. Be patient. Put your boots on and your head up. Be careful to watch where you are walking, so that you avoid any potential danger. Walk with someone else so you can help each other when the mud is deep and you are in danger of getting stuck. Be patient, knowing that in time the ground will eventually thaw and the mess and the mud will gradually pass. The path may not ever be the same, but a new path forward is certain to emerge.

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