SELF, WORK

A Seasonal Year: Emergence & Growth in Business

Join Emma Coxon for the second instalment of her journey on year-long course, A Seasonal Year, as she learns what it really means to emerge and grow in business in alignment with nature and the seasons.

Emma Coxon
Blogger & Writer for Psychologies Magazine, Little Piece of Wonder

Follow

Published May 13, 2020

Like Comment Share

"Nothing is ever lost as time passes, it merely metamorphoses into something as wonderful or, in some cases, into something even better than before." Carole Carlton

I love this quote; it perfectly describes the transformative nature of life and the seasons of change, both in ourselves and in the natural world.

As you may recall from my recent article, I embarked on the A Seasonal Year course by Folk & Field in October last year, a course which helps small business owners work in alignment with the seasons. Folk and Field founders Eleanor Cheetham and Maddy Lawson are passionate about helping people get back to nature and showing them how to rewild, realign and reconnect. They do this through a programme of courses and before lockdown, a series of gatherings that connect like-minded folk, which will hopefully return in the future.

One of the guiding principles of the course is the Celtic Wheel of the Year, an ancient calendar guided by the transition of the sun throughout the seasons. It is an approach that teaches us how to live and work more slowly and seasonally.

As the natural world hibernated throughout the Winter, I went inwards, and immersed myself in reflecting on my business and the work of the past year. When Midwinter arrived from January to February, I started to move into the phase of 'renewal', being guided every step of the way by exercises and questions in each of the modules of the course. We focused on dreaming and creativity, considering the rituals and rhythms around our work and began to bring the ideas we had started to formulate, to life.

Daily walks are one of the rituals that I have incorporated into my working day and strolling along familiar paths in mid-February and into March, I noticed nature re-awakening. Buds were appearing on the branches of trees and snowdrops were in bloom, and it was at this point in the course that our attention turned to the topic of 'emerging'.

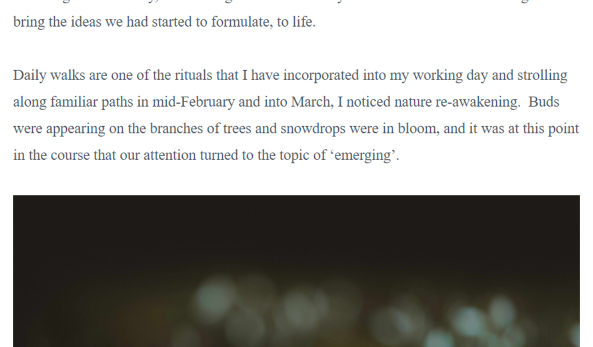

Photo: Annie Spratt

Imbolc, the Wheel of the Year festival that marks the beginning of Spring, is celebrated on 1st February, and is a signal that we are in a period of transformation and flux. It is the festival associated with lambing season and is linked to fertility and conception. It's the time when seeds begin to move from beneath the surface to above the ground – they are growing and becoming more visible. When we translate this into our businesses, it's when the long period of Winter reflection shifts to embrace new life and growth. Having worked on the seeds of ideas for how I'd like to take my business forward, I then prepared to make these visible, and share with the world.

However, the shoots that emerge from the earth need the right conditions to flourish, so with this in mind, I contemplated how I could develop these ideas, as we moved into Spring, without reaching burnout. Just as nature needs the right environment to emerge and grow, so too do we. Firstly, we were encouraged to consider how we can create space in our lives, both inner and outer. The metaphors used in the course of earth, air, fire, water and aether (space) really resonate with me and help me look at each aspect of my life. For me, it is important that I find space for my wellbeing with regular exercise, a wholesome diet, a good night's sleep, time in nature, plenty of downtime and by developing a daily practice of meditation and periods of quiet. But I also look at the areas of my life and work that make me feel grounded, inspired, ambitious, calm, and uplifted and note how I can incorporate more of those. From self-care, time for my creative passions, developing new revenue streams (so I'm more financially stable), to spending time with loved ones and having space, time and money to travel. This felt like a bit of a spring clean for the soul and helped me gain clarity for the way ahead.

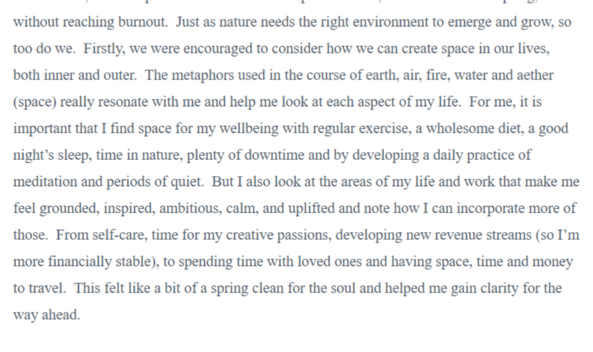

Photo: Lena Myzovets

As business ideas began to emerge, the next stage was to look at storytelling; how would I communicate these ideas externally with my customers and target audience?

My passion lies in writing and my blog, Little Piece of Wonder and I've been working on ideas for an online course over the Winter months. I considered how this might look and how I would communicate my message effectively to help others learn to connect with nature and the wonders of life.

In addition to my writing, I dream of having a revenue stream as an artist and photographer. My vision board is full of artists' studios surrounded by nature where I have the time and space to create. So, I'm happy when we were invited to produce a 'word cloud'; a visual/verbal representation of our thoughts and ideas, about our business story so far, and how we want it to look in the future. My key words included nature, freedom, creativity, purpose, meaning, art, vitality, energy, adventure and connection.

Phjoto: Ciocan Ciprian

The final exercise of the emerge module was to evaluate the communities we have in our lives, those we communicate with; friends and family business friends, social media contacts and followers, those on our mailing list, business groups. But, it's not only these 'outer connections' that are important, the 'inner connection' we have with ourselves is imperative too; our self-care, quiet time, connection to our purpose and values, staying true to ourselves. All of these have an impact. I love how Eleanor and Maddy related these connections to the image of a tree, with the roots being how we nourish ourselves, and the trunk and branches representing our outer community. I've always felt that in order to be our best selves in the world, we need to look after ourselves first.

What I've enjoyed about the course up until this point, is the gentle way in which it's been delivered. It speaks to each of us as individuals, there are no expectations, no deadlines, no set ways of doing things, just as in nature. It flows with the seasons. Prompts are e-mailed every couple of weeks to remind us to move onto the next lesson, as it helps to follow these timings, so you can relate each module to the season you're in. But, there's no pressure, just beautifully curated and carefully considered workbooks, guidance and resources, plus a warm and supportive Facebook group.

As I write this, we have just passed the point in the year known as Beltane (a Celtic word which means 'fires of Bel' referring to Bel, a Celtic deity), we are at the mid-point between the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice. Beltane (1st May this year), a fire festival, marks the beginning of Summer for the ancient Celts and it was a day for dance and song to hail the sown fields starting to sprout and celebrates the fertility of the coming year.

This is the time of year for growth, and as the saying goes 'mighty oaks from little acorns grow!' However, I arrived into May feeling pretty tired and overwhelmed. Lockdown has resulted in switching focus from developing my Little Piece of Wonder online course, spending time drawing, painting and photographing to juggling work and childcare. My husband and I have a beautiful 16 month old daughter, who usually goes to nursery part-time, but for now we're sharing the childcare whilst both working from home. In all honesty, I don't feel ready to launch the projects I had been planning for in Spring.

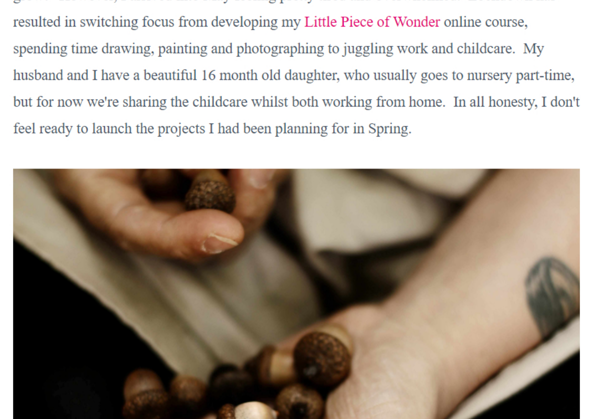

Photo: Ksenia Makagonova

Growth in business is often measured in terms of earnings, subscribers, followers, likes, comments and website hits. But, as is pointed out in the 'grow' module of the course "growth isn't restricted to a single direction: contrary to popular belief, it doesn't have to happen in a straight line or an upward trajectory...also consider the idea of downward growth; nurturing roots through further planning, testing, research, learning, or whatever you feel you need in order to progress." This resonates with me completely, and I can imagine that with the challenges lockdown presents, there are many other business owners in this place right now too.

As well as juggling childcare and work, I am also in a phase of some quite deep self development. I'm at a stage where I'm exploring better ways to nurture myself; my mental health, a daily spiritual practice of meditation, quiet, walks in nature and so, I welcome the idea of allowing breathing space to spend more time nourishing my 'roots' and developing my ideas further before launching.

This module provides a chance to look at my passions, my skills and how I'd like to develop them in the future. Like many business owners I find it hard to define what I 'do' in one job title, because I'm a writer, a blogger, a project manager and I hope to also be able to say one day soon 'I'm an artist and photographer'. Which is why the concept of multipotentiality that is presented at this stage in the course seems so apt. Multipotentiality "refers to anyone who finds it difficult to identify just one calling in life and chooses instead to pursue a broad range of interests and skills." I used to be envious of anyone who knew, from an early age, what they wanted to do with their lives, but I now feel grateful to have the flexibility to pursue various passions in my work.

We are reminded that "nature is able to support growth across multiple different facets". However, this isn't quite as easy for us humans as we usually need to decide where we spend our time and energy and set clear priorities and make an effort to nurture them. But, what if there was a way to enjoy all of our passions and use our various skills? This is where "tilting" comes in. It's an approach that allows us to handle tasks and responsibilities by leaning towards what's most important at any given time. It removes the pressure on ourselves. What a breath of fresh air! It's so easy to beat ourselves up about what we *should* be achieving in different areas of our lives, but tilting allows us to gently adapt depending on what is going on for us.

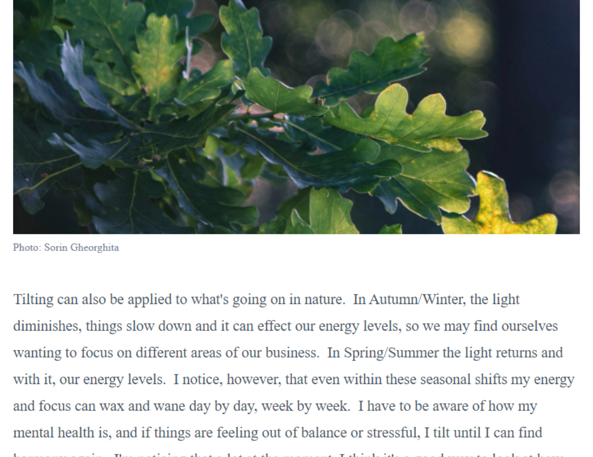

Photo: Sorin Gheorghita

Tilting can also be applied to what's going on in nature. In Autumn/Winter, the light diminishes, things slow down and it can effect our energy levels, so we may find ourselves wanting to focus on different areas of our business. In Spring/Summer the light returns and with it, our energy levels. I notice, however, that even within these seasonal shifts my energy and focus can wax and wane day by day, week by week. I have to be aware of how my mental health is, and if things are feeling out of balance or stressful, I tilt until I can find harmony again. I'm noticing that a lot at the moment. I think it's a good way to look at how we're all adapting and coping with the current world circumstances; a more gentle approach that leaves room for self-compassion and flexibility.

One of my favourite exercises of the 'grow' module is about bringing the outside in. I've always been drawn to doing this, which is evident if you look around my home; there are dried flowers, plants, treasured objects collected in nature, natural fragrances. Here we are reminded of the benefits of bringing the natural world into our workplaces. Incorporating essential oils (using a diffuser, for example) into your work space has been proven to decrease stress hormones and relieve tension. Adding plants which naturally clean the air can aid healing and improve concentration. Sounds of nature have a restorative effect on our cognitive abilities. There are many creative ways we can bring the outside in, and it's wonderfully nurturing to surround yourself with aspects of the natural world.

The final lesson in this module, all of which is beautifully designed to support our growth in business, is focused on purpose. When I first set up my business in 2009, I remember how strong my sense of purpose was. It all felt new and exciting, I was enlivened and ready to take on the world! But, over the years, at different stages in my business's development, this clear sense of my 'why' had faded. Life events, stress, anxiety, difficult clients, financial worries, these have all come up along the way and made me question what I was doing. So, this exercise felt like a great way to breathe life back into what I'm doing and get clear on my purpose, especially as I prepare to launch new products in the future.

I considered these three questions:

- Why do I do what I do?
- How do I do what I do?
- What is it I do?

I am going to take some time to ponder these questions further, to give them the consideration they deserve. This is the foundation, it's what will keep me going in tough times, will allow me to develop new ideas for my business that are in alignment with my inner most passions and values. As things fluctuate in my business, as in nature, I can tilt, find my balance, and come back to this purpose each time. It's my guiding light, my 'north star.'

To find out more about A Seasonal Year, and to register your interest for the next enrolment, click here. You can also follow Folk and Field on Instagram here and Facebook here.

Check back here in July when I'll be sharing more about the course.

Emma Coxon
Blogger & Writer for Psychologies Magazine, Little Piece of Wonder
Emma is a freelance writer and Psychologies magazine's Food & Living Editor. She also writes a blog, Little Piece of Wonder focusing on her passion for nature, seasonal and mindful living. She lives in the Wiltshire countryside with her husband and daughter.

Follow