

Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change (4th edition)

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Managing people and organizations during times of tumultuous change is one of the most difficult tasks leaders face. During such times, they might be tempted to take short cuts, accomplish quick results, and move on to the next thing. Almost always, this behavior backfires and the organization either gets bogged down in resistance to change or struggles through poorly planned change and winds up with endless tangential problems, slowing progress, building a culture of distrust and animosity, and making future successful change even more difficult to achieve. (xiv)

The good news is that while the actual changes organizations face may be incredibly complex and possibly differ from any previously experienced, the transition process by which people get through change is well-mapped. In managing the transitions that flow from the changes, we have a set of oars that is tried and true. (xiv)

First, the results you are seeking depend on getting people to stop doing things the old way and getting them to start doing things a new way. And since people have a personal connection to how they work, there is just no way to do that impersonally. And second, transition management is based on some abilities you already have and some techniques for which you can train and learn; it is a way of dealing with people that makes everyone feel more comfortable. (xiv-xv)

It is self-defeating to try to overcome people's resistance to change without addressing the threat the change poses to their world. Understanding this and practicing transition management skills outlined here will give leaders the opportunity to advance with confidence, communicate with clarity, and reassure employees that they are following a roadmap. Employees can take comfort in the message that we've been on similar roads before and survived the trip. (introduction, xiv-xv)

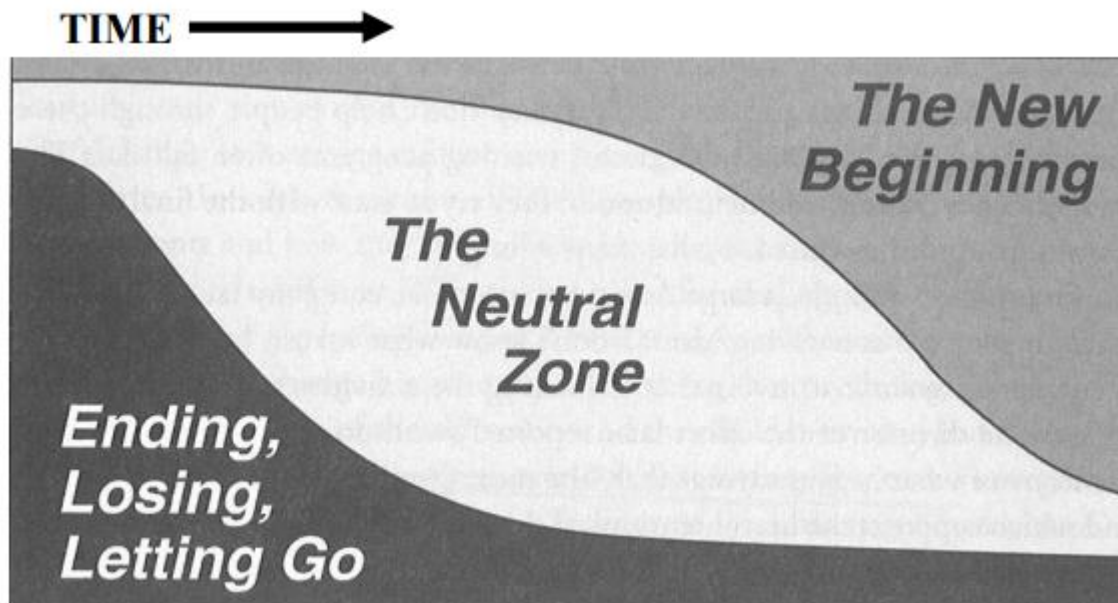
- Although even the best leaders cannot anticipate all the changes that are coming, all leaders can improve their effectiveness in helping their organization through the transition process.
- Effective leaders understand the relational side of organizational life and during transitions they elevate rather than neglect those personal connections.
- Effective transition management requires a leader to understand and address the personal threat that the current change is causing their team members.
- As a leader you cannot always tell your team, "We are on top of every change that comes our way," but you can tell them, "We've successfully dealt with change before, and if we manage this transition properly, we will come out stronger in the end."

It Isn't the Changes That Do You In

Bridges clearly differentiates the words **CHANGE** and **TRANSITION**. "Change is situational: the move to a new site, the retirement of the founder, the reorganization of the roles on the team.... Transition, on the other hand is psychological: it is a three-phase process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about....When change happens without people going through a transition, it is just a rearrangement of the chairs. It's what people mean when they say, 'Just because everything has changed, doesn't mean anything is different around here.'" (3)

Change hinges on the external situation; what one does, but **transition** is internal, based on how one feels, and depends on letting go of the old reality and the old identity one had before the change took place. Think of getting your first job, moving into your first home, or coming home with your first child. The actual change probably happened pretty fast, but the psychological transition happened much more slowly: instead of becoming a new person as fast as you changed outwardly, you found yourself struggling for a time in a state that was neither the old nor the new. It was a kind of emotional wilderness, a time when it wasn't quite clear who you were at that point, or what was real. (9)

Here is how the Bridges picture that transition process (5):



The three phases are:

1. **Ending**—Letting go of the old ways and the old identity people had. This first phase of transition is an ending, and the time when you need to help people deal with their losses.
2. **Neutral Zone**—Going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn't fully operational. It's when the critical psychological realignments and repatterning take place. Perhaps the term "Neutral Zone" is not a strong enough term to describe the emotions that could be present in a major change situation. Some think of it as a kind of DMZ (de-militarized zone) or perhaps more of a "Disputed Territory" to reflect the deep emotions and pushbacks experienced and observed. This is where most of the actual change occurs and people tend to feel the most disconnected from what they were and what they will become.
3. **Beginning**—Coming out of the transition and making a new beginning. This is when people develop the new identity, experience the new energy, and discover the new sense of purpose that makes the change begin to work. Because transition is a process by which people unplug from an old world and plug into a new world, we can say that transition starts with an ending and finishes with a beginning.

Calling them "phases" makes it sound as though they are lined up like rooms in a house, and transition is rarely that tidy. Perhaps it would be more accurate to think of these as three points along the path and to say that the transition cannot be completed until all three have taken place.

Step one: Ending

Several important differences between change and transition are overlooked when people think of transition as simply gradual or unfinished change or when they use “change” and “transition” interchangeably. **The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome but the ending that you’ll have to make to leave the old situation behind.**

The failure to identify and get ready for endings and losses is the largest difficulty for people in transition. And the failure to provide help with endings and losses leads to more problems for organizations in transition than anything else. Organizations that overlook that letting-go process do nothing about the feelings of loss that it generates. And in overlooking those effects, they nearly guarantee that the transition will be mismanaged and that, as a result, the change will go badly. **Unmanaged transition makes change unmanageable.** (6-8)

Q: Reflecting back on a recent personal experience with transition, what were some of the things that you had to “let go” before you could complete the change process? Are there still some things that you need to let go?

Getting People to Let Go

“Before you can begin something new, you have to end what used to be.... Beginnings depend on endings. The problem is, people don’t like endings.” (27)

Leaders who are effective change agents:

1. **Identify Who’s Losing What** by answering five critical questions (29):

- What specifically is going to change and how?
- What are the secondary changes that are likely to arise?
- Who is going to have to let go of something and what are those things?
- How many of the changes are concrete and how many are emotional and subjective?
- Is there something that is over for everyone?

2. **Accept the Reality and Importance of the Subjective Losses**

Don’t argue with what you hear when people express loss: 1.) it will stop the conversation and you won’t learn anything more; 2.) loss is a subjective experience, and your “objective” view is irrelevant; and 3.) arguing makes your task more difficult by convincing people that you don’t understand them – or worse yet, that you don’t care what they feel and think. “You need everyone’s commitment because only with commitment will people give 100 percent. You won’t get people’s commitment unless you understand them and make decisions based on that understanding. So however you do it, learn who is experiencing a loss of some kind and what it is they are losing.” (30)

3. **Expect some period of overreaction**

People seem to “overreact” to a change when *they* are reacting more than *we* are: (31)

- Changes cause transitions, which cause losses, and it is often the losses, not the changes, that they’re overacting to.
- It’s a piece of *their* world that is being lost, not a piece of ours, and we often react that way ourselves when it’s part of our own world that is being lost. Being reasonable is much easier if you have little or nothing at stake.

Overreacting also comes from past experiences, either with losses that haven’t adequately been dealt with or when endings became viewed as symbolic of some larger loss. Someone whose job seemed clear and secure is now assigned very different roles and tasks, and coworkers begin to wonder, “Am I next?” Learn to look for the loss behind the “overreaction” and deal with the underlying issue.

4. Acknowledge the Losses Openly and Sympathetically (31-32)

Don't shy away from bringing losses out into the open—acknowledge them and express your concern for the affected people. Do it simply and directly. It is pretending that the loss is inconsequential or doesn't even exist that stirs up trouble, not the acknowledgement/discussion of it. Research on what helps people recover from loss of all kinds agrees that recovery happens more quickly if the losses can be openly discussed.

5. Expect and Accept the Signs of Grieving (33-34)

When endings take place, people get angry, sad, frightened, depressed, and confused. These emotional states can be mistaken for bad morale, but they aren't. They're signs of grieving, the natural sequence of emotions people go through when they lose something that matters to them. Always expect to see various displays of • Denial • Anger • Bargaining • Anxiety • Sadness • Disorientation • Depression.

6. Compensate for the Losses (34-36)

No pain no gain, they say. But many change efforts fail because the people affected experience only the pain. As a leader you may know that in the long run the institution will experience gain, but too often for employees, it can seem to be all loss, and all they'll gain is more pain. Trying to talk them out of their feelings will get you nowhere. Find a way to act...Think, "What can I give back to balance what's been taken away?" It doesn't have to be financial. Status, turf, recognition, new roles or desirable responsibilities, improved work spaces; even small gestures can be meaningful when done thoughtfully.

7. Give people information, and do it again and again (36-37)

There are lots of rationalizations for not communicating. Most commonly:

- *They don't need to know yet. We'll tell them when the time comes. It'll just upset them now.*
- *They already know. We announced it!*
- *I told the middle managers. It's their job to pass on the message.*
- *We don't know all the details yet ourselves, so there's no point in saying anything until everything has been decided.*

Threatening information is absorbed remarkably slowly, and often incompletely. Leaders must find as many different ways to share as possible. When people don't understand what is going on, resentment and fear blossom. People will create stories of their own to explain what is happening, usually relying on innuendo, gossip, wild guesses and worst-case-scenarios. Say what you know, admit you don't know more and provide a timetable for additional information, repeat the cycle often and regularly.

8. Define what's over and what isn't (37-38)

One of the most important leadership roles during times of change is that of putting into words what it is time to leave behind. Leaders risk three equally serious and difficult reactions when they do not specify what is over and what isn't:

1. People don't dare to stop doing anything; they try to do all the old things and the new things. Soon they burn out with the overload.
2. People make their own decisions about what to discard and what to keep, and the result is inconsistency and chaos.
3. People toss out everything that was done in the past, and the baby, the tub and all the toys disappear with the bathwater.

9. Mark the endings, treat the past with respect & let people take a piece of the old way with them (38-41)

Create actions or activities that dramatize endings. Let go with humor if you can, or whatever appropriate gesture you can think of that will be meaningful. Honor the past for what it has accomplished. Present innovations as developments that build on the past and help to realize its potential. Endings occur more easily if people can take a bit of the past with them. You are trying to disengage people from it, not stamp it out like an infection. And especially, you don't want to make people feel punished for having been part of it. (34-36)

10. Show how endings ensure the continuity of what really matters (41-42)

The past, which people are likely to idealize during an ending, was the product of change. When people start talking about 'the good old days,' it's easy to imagine that they are describing a peaceful time of stability. But that is selective memory. There were changes then too. Whenever something that is viewed as a break with the past turns out successfully, people forget the loss they felt when the change happened and begin to celebrate it as a 'tradition.' Yesterday's endings launched today's success, and today will have to end if tomorrow's changes are to take place.

Whatever must end, must end. Don't drag it out. Plan it carefully, and once it is done, allow time for healing.... But people have to let go of the present first. Leaders forget that while the first task of change management is to understand the desired outcome and how to get there, the first task of transition management is to convince people to leave home. You'll save yourself a lot of grief if you remember the distinction.

Endings Checklist for Administrators:

◆ Have I studied the change carefully and identified who is likely to lose what—including what I myself am likely to lose? ◆ Do I understand the subjective realities of those losses to the people who experience them, even when they seem to me to be overreacting? ◆ Have I acknowledged these losses with sympathy? ◆ Have I permitted people to grieve and protected them from well-meant attempts to stop them from expressing their anger or sadness? ◆ Have I publicly expressed my own sense of loss, if I feel any? ◆ Have I found ways to compensate people for their losses? ◆ Am I giving people accurate information and doing it again and again using a variety of communications media? ◆ Have I defined clearly what is over and what isn't? ◆ Have I found ways to "mark the ending?" ◆ Am I being careful not to denigrate the past but, when possible, finding ways to honor it? ◆ Have I made a plan for giving people a piece of the past to take with them? ◆ Have I made it clear how the ending we are making is necessary to protect the continuity of the organization or conditions on which the organization depends? ◆ Is the ending we are making big enough to get the job done in one step?

These are muscles that must be constantly exercised. Large change is less scary when people are used to effectively dealing with smaller changes via scaled versions of these processes. What actions can you take to help people deal more successfully with the endings that are taking place in your organization? What can you do today to get started on this aspect of transition management?

Step two: The Neutral Zone

The second step is understanding what comes after the letting go: the neutral zone. This is the psychological no-man's-land between letting go of the old reality and landing into the new one. If leaders don't understand and expect it, they'll try to rush through or even bypass this part of transition. Many may mistakenly conclude that the confusion and feelings of groundlessness in this phase are a sign that something is wrong. Some may be alarmed in this transitional maelstrom and try to prematurely escape. (Employees do this frequently, which is why there is often an increased level of turnover during organizational changes.)

If an organization emerges prematurely from the neutral zone, you'll not only compromise the change but also lose a great opportunity. Painful though it is, the neutral zone is the individual's and the organization's best chance to be creative, to develop into what they need to become, and to rejuvenate themselves for the time ahead. The neutral zone is thus both a dangerous and an opportune place, and it is the very core of the transition process. (9)

Leading People Through the Neutral Zone (45-48)

When the change is deep and far-reaching, the time between the old identity and the new can stretch out for months, even years. Neutral zones occur not only in organizations but also in individual lives and in the history of whole societies. The dangers represented by the neutral zone take several forms:

1. *People's anxiety rises and their motivation falls.* They become resentful and self-protective, and energy is drained away from work into coping tactics.
2. *People in the neutral zone miss more work and are less productive overall than at other times.*
3. *Old weaknesses, previously patched over or compensated for, reemerge in full flower.*
4. *People are overloaded, priorities get confused, information is miscommunicated, important tasks go undone.*
5. *People become polarized: some want to rush forward, and others want to go back to the old ways.*
6. *Disorganized and tired, people respond slowly and halfheartedly to issues that arise.* If they are resentful and looking for ways to pay the organization back, they may even sabotage the organization's ability to respond to problems.

It's the management of the time in the neutral zone that prevents the organization from coming apart as it crosses the gap between the old way and the new. The graphic below (47) helps us visualize the Neutral Zone reality that major change requires what exists to be torn apart and reconfigured, which is significantly scary for all. But it can also be a massively creative time. The task before a leader becomes twofold: first, to get your people through the neutral zone in one piece; and second, to capitalize on all the confusion by encouraging them to be innovative. (48-49)

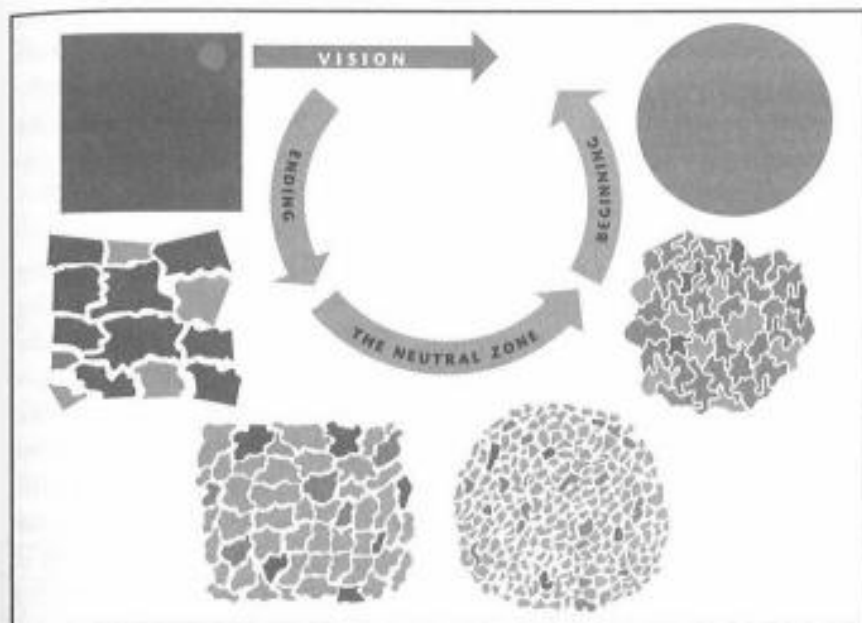


Figure 4.1 Transition: A square morphs into a circle.

Give people imagery to work with. (50-51) Bridges provides an example of a company who announced a plant closing at a specific time in the future. The employees at the plant quickly began to use the metaphor of a sinking ship. Leaders helped them work through the neutral zone by redefining it as people taking a voyage. With the new metaphor they talked about the ship "reaching port," where everyone could "disembark" in a planned fashion and affirming those who "stayed on board" WOULD make it to port. This may seem like mere word play, but these are two very different ways of looking at a difficult situation. The new metaphor didn't

invalidate the difficulty, it gave purpose to the situation. The old metaphor left people feeling hopeless. The new metaphor carried the message, "Make the most of this situation, and we'll get there together."

Bridges offers six steps leaders can take to give structure and strength during a time when people are likely to feel lost and confused:

1. *Do everything possible to protect people from further significant changes while they're trying to regain their balance...* People can deal with a lot of change if it is coherent and part of a larger whole. But unrelated and unexpected changes, even small ones, can be real setbacks. Many nonessential changes can be headed off or at least delayed.
2. *Review policies and procedures to see that they are adequate to deal with the confusing fluidity of the neutral zone.* What kinds of adjustments and support will people need when it comes to what and how things are done during this time?
3. *What new roles, reporting relationships, or configurations of the organization chart need to be developed to get through this time in the wilderness?* Who will be responsible for what, and how can people on different levels best support each other during this time?
4. *Set short-range goals for people to aim toward and to establish checkpoints along the way.* Small successes and signs of progress help to counter the feeling of being lost, of meaninglessness, and of self-doubt that are common in the neutral zone.
5. *Don't set people up for failure by promising that you will deliver high levels of output while you are in the neutral zone.* Keep expectations of productivity realistic.
6. *Find out what leaders at various levels need to learn to function successfully in the neutral zone and then provide necessary training in those areas.*

One additional step worthy of its own section is to **strengthen intra-group connections**. (53) The neutral zone is a lonely place. People feel isolated, especially if they don't understand what is happening to them. Old problems are likely to resurface, and old resentments are likely to come back to life. It is especially important to try to rebuild a sense of identification with the group and of connectedness with one another via good communication. Be wary of any arrangement or activity that shows a preference for one group over others. During this middle phase of transition, people want to feel that 'we are all in this boat together.' (54) For larger institutions, creating a transition monitoring team can be helpful. (54-56)

Using the neutral zone creatively. (56-59) Bridges points out that "with everything up in the air anyway, people are more willing than usual to try new things," (56) and lists seven things that a leader can do to encourage creativity during this phase:

1. Establish by word and administrative example that this is a time to step back and take stock, a time to question the 'usual,' and a time to develop and try out new and creative solutions to the organization's difficulties.
2. Provide opportunities for others to review what they do, both organizationally and individually. Offer people the chance to refocus their efforts in areas of growing interest to them. Keep people informed about what is being done with new ideas being generated. Nothing undermines these efforts faster than good/interesting ideas being forgotten or not taken seriously.
3. Encourage learning in the areas of discovery and innovation. Now is the time for creative thinking. Train and develop talent and new ideas.

4. Encourage experimentation and a test-and-try atmosphere. People always have ideas they've been wishing to try. Give your blessing. You'll be surprised how many improvements are just waiting for the chance to happen.
5. Embrace losses, setbacks, or disadvantages as learning opportunities and entry points into new solutions.
6. Look for opportunities to brainstorm new answers to old problems.
7. Restrain the natural impulse in times of ambiguity and disorganization to push prematurely for certainty and closure. Be careful you don't unwittingly squeeze out thoughtful dissent or other ways of thinking.

Leaders should ask: How can I make this interim between the old and the new not only a bearable time but a time during which the organization and everyone's place in it are enhanced? How can we come out of this waiting time better than we were before the transition started? (58)

Neutral Zone Checklist: ♦ Have I done my best to normalize the neutral zone by explaining it as an uncomfortable time that (with careful attention) can be turned to everyone's advantage? ♦ Have I redefined the neutral zone by choosing an affirmative metaphor with which to describe it? ♦ Have I reinforced that metaphor with training programs, policy changes, and encouragement for people to keep doing their jobs during the neutral zone? ♦ Am I protecting people adequately from inessential further changes? ♦ If I can't protect them, am I clustering those changes meaningfully? ♦ Have I created the temporary policies and procedures that we need to get us through the neutral zone? ♦ Have I created the temporary roles, reporting relationships, and organizational groupings that we need to get us through the neutral zone? ♦ Have I set short-range goals and checkpoints? ♦ Have I set realistic output objectives? ♦ Have I found ways to keep people feeling that they still belong to the organization and are valued by our part of it? And have I taken care that perks and other forms of 'privilege' are not undermining the solidarity of the group? ♦ Have I stepped back and taken stock of how things are being done in my part of the organization? ♦ Have I provided others with opportunities and resources to do the same thing? ♦ Have I seen to it that people build their skills in creative thinking and innovation? ♦ Have I encouraged experimentation and seen to it that people are not punished for failing in intelligent efforts that do not pan out? ♦ Have I worked to transform the challenges of our organization into opportunities to try doing things a new way? ♦ Have I set an example by brainstorming many answers to old problems—the ones that people say we just have to live with? Am I encouraging others to do the same? ♦ Am I regularly checking to see that I am not pushing for certainty and closure when it would be more conducive to creativity to live a little longer with uncertainty and questions? ♦ Am I using my time in the neutral zone as an opportunity to replace bucket brigades with integrated systems throughout the organization?

Step Three: Launching a New Beginning

Beginnings are psychological phenomena. (65) They are marked by a release of new energy in a new direction—they are the expression of a new identity. They are much more than the practical and situational "new circumstances" that we might call starts. On a situational level, things can be changed quickly; however, a new beginning will take place only after people have come through the wilderness and are ready to make the emotional commitment to do things the new way and see themselves as new people. Beginnings involve new understandings, new values, new attitudes, and—most of all—new identities. A start can and should be carefully designed, like an object. A beginning can and should be nurtured, like a plant. Starts take place on a schedule as a result of decisions. Beginnings follow the timing of the mind and heart. (66)

Ambivalence Toward Beginnings

Beginnings are strange things. People want them to happen but fear them at the same time. After long and seemingly pointless wanderings through the neutral zone, most people are greatly relieved to arrive at whatever Promised Land they've been moving toward. Yet beginnings are also scary, for they require a new commitment. They require, in some sense, that people become the new kind of person that the new situation demands.

Reasons people resist new beginnings (66-67):

1. Beginnings reactivate some of the old letting-go anxieties, firmly establishing that an ending was real.
2. The new way of doing things represents a gamble: there is always the possibility it won't work.
3. The prospect of a risky new beginning will probably trigger old memories of failures in similar circumstances.
4. For some people, new beginnings end what was a pleasant experience of relief from accountability and pressure in the neutral zone.

Bridges notes that "More beginnings abort because they were not preceded by well-managed endings and neutral zones than for any other reason." (68) He then points to the Four P's that a leader can do to pave the way for better beginnings:

1. You can explain the basic **Purpose** behind the outcome you seek.
2. You can paint a **Picture** of how the outcome will look and feel.
3. You can lay out a step-by-step **Plan** for phasing in the outcome.
4. You can give each person a **Part** to play in both the plan and the outcome.

Clarify and Communicate the Purpose: (69-72)

Often people have trouble understanding the purpose because they do not have a realistic idea of where the organization really stands and what its problems are. In that case, you need to "sell the problems" before you try to sell a solution to those problems. If that wasn't done during the ending phase— when it should have been done—now is the time to provide answers to these questions:

- 1.) What is the problem? What is the situation that requires this change to solve it?
- 2.) Who says so, and on what evidence?
- 3.) What would (or wouldn't) occur if no one acted to solve this problem? (69)

One of the most difficult obstacles to many beginnings is that for employees, there **is** no discernible purpose behind the proposed changes. There are different reasons for an apparent lack of purpose, and each of them calls for a different action from you: (70-71)

1. The purpose is not discernible because it has not yet been clearly explained in terms that mean something to employees. The solution here is more clarity and more effective communications from the leadership team.
2. The purpose is not discernible because it has not been communicated at all. He suggests three reasons this happens.
 - There may be no purpose, at least none that will stand up to open scrutiny.
 - There is an idea, but the leadership isn't talking because they don't think that people need to understand...or that they don't need to understand *now*.
 - There is a purpose—at least you strongly suspect there is—but the "official reason" is a smoke screen to cover what cannot publicly be said.

Most importantly:

1.) The purpose must be real, not make-believe or a condescending fabrication, and 2.) The purpose needs to grow out of the actual situation faced by the organization and the organization's nature and resources. (71)

Paint a Picture (72-73)

Purposes are critical to beginnings, but they can be rather abstract. They are ideas, and most people are not ready to throw themselves into a difficult and risky undertaking simply based on an idea. They need a picture of how the outcome will look, and they need to be able to imagine how it will feel to be a participant in it. Use visuals (floor plans, flow charts, etc.) to convey how things will be. If possible, arrange for people to see another organization where things are already done in the new way. Anything you can do to help people visualize the change will help.

Two things to watch out for (74):

- Don't expect the picture to have its effect prematurely. **Leaders typically go through their transitions before they launch the changes. By the time they are ready to announce the change, they have long since put their endings and their neutral zone behind them, and now they're ready for a new beginning. But they forget that their staff and employees will just be entering the ending and/or neutral zone at the point the change is announced.** Stop and ponder the reality that as you lead change, you will be significantly ahead of those you lead in processing the new idea. With this reality in mind, how can you use imagery to help others process the change more effectively?
- Be careful not to overwhelm people with a picture that is so far ahead of where they are or hard for them to identify with that they become intimidated rather than excited.

Create a Plan (75)

Bridges notes that many leaders expect everyone in the institution to respond to transition imagery in the same way. However, for those who are operationally-minded, the picture can be interesting, but they get frustrated by lack of details. For them, the question is, "What do we do on Monday?" A transition plan outlines the steps and schedule by which people will receive the information, training and support needed to make the transition. It lays out the nature and timing of key events.

A transition management plan differs from a change management plan in three specific ways:

1. It is much more detailed, addressing the change on the personal rather than the collective level.
2. It is oriented to the process and not just the outcome, laying out details of what's going to be done to help individuals deal with the effects of the changes.
3. The progression steps involved are reversed: A change management plan starts with the outcome and then works backward, step by step, to create the necessary preconditions for the outcome. A transition management plan starts with where people are and works forward, step by step, through the process of leaving the past behind, getting through the wilderness and profiting from it, and emerging with new attitudes, behaviors, and identity. (75-76)

Make sure people have a Part to Play (76-78)

Plans are immensely reassuring to people, not just because they contain information, but because they exist. Bridges specifies two goals leaders must achieve here: 1.) employees need to see their role and their relationship to others in the new scheme of things. Until they know this, they can't begin to adjust hopes and fears to meet their new reality. 2.) they need a role in dealing effectively with the transition process itself. Allowing everyone to play a part in the transition management process:

- gives people new insight into the real problems being faced by the organization.
- can help the leader get people aligned as they focus together on solving the problems. This can help create allies rather than adversaries.

- brings participants' firsthand knowledge to bear on solving the problems. Leaders can't anticipate everything. Front line input can be extremely helpful.
- The knowledge provided will also include relevant facts about the self-interest of the various parties affected by the situation. Outcomes work best if they serve (or at least don't violate) the self-interest of the participants. Without this knowledge, even the best solutions can run afoul of human issues.
- Everyone who plays a part is, tacitly at least, implicated in the outcome. (77-78)

Reinforcing the New Beginning (78-82)

In order to reinforce progress already made:

1. **Be Consistent.** Consistent in the messages you send through policies, procedures, and priorities that do not conflict with or contradict the desired changes. Consistent in your actions as a leader—are you walking the talk? And, consistent in rewarding the “right kind of actions.” In other words, don't tell people to act and react in a new way, while rewarding them for old behaviors (such as preaching decentralized authority, then encouraging hands-on management).
2. **Ensure Quick Success**—your plan should include some early opportunities for success, no matter how small. Quick successes reassure the believers, convince the doubters, and confound the critics.
3. **Symbolize the New Identity**— Symbolic changes reinforce new identities. Updating staff badges, distributing supplies with a new logo, sharing group pictures and workflow charts of newly configured departments; small things can take on enormous importance as individuals struggle to make new beginnings work.
4. **Celebrate the Success**—When you feel that the majority of your people are emerging from the wilderness and that a new purpose, a new system, and a new sense of identity have been established, you'll do well to take time to celebrate successful transitions.

Bridges points out that a single transition may not be enough to bring about the complete transformation of the organization and the reorientation of its people; there may instead be a string of transitions, each of which carries the organization a step further along the path of its development. These multi-transition turnings can take years to finish. (93)

In communications along the way, effective leaders speak to wherever people are NOW, not just to where they'll be “someday”. At this point, employees need help, not in achieving the destination they'll ultimately reach, but in taking the NEXT BEST STEP in the transition in which they find themselves because of that big upcoming change. What kind of reinforcements will help people develop the new attitudes and behaviors that will be necessary if the new beginning is to work? (103)

Managing the New Beginning Checklist

◆ Am I distinguishing in my own mind, and in my expectations of others, between the start, which can happen on a planned schedule, and the beginning, which will not? ◆ Do I accept the fact that people are going to be ambivalent toward the beginning I am trying to bring about? ◆ Have I taken care of the ending(s) and the neutral zone, or am I trying to make a new beginning happen before it possibly can? ◆ Have I clarified and communicated the purpose of (the idea behind) the change? ◆ Have I drawn an effective picture of the change's outcome and found ways to communicate it effectively? ◆ Have I created a plan for bringing people through the three phases of transition – and distinguished it in my own mind from the change management plan? ◆ Have I helped people to discover as soon as possible the part that they will play in the outcome of these changes, and how that outcome will affect the part they currently play within the organization? ◆ Have I ensured that everyone has a part to play in the transition management process and that they understand that

part? ♦ Have I checked to see that policies, procedures, and priorities are consistent with the new beginning I am trying to make so that inconsistencies aren't sending a mixed message? ♦ Am I watching my own actions carefully to be sure that I am effectively modeling the attitudes and behaviors I am asking others to develop? ♦ Have I found ways, financial and nonfinancial, to reward people for becoming the new people I am calling on them to become? ♦ Have I built into my plans some occasions for quick success to help people rebuild their self-confidence and to build the image of the transition as successful? ♦ Have I found ways to celebrate the new beginning and the conclusion of the time of transition? ♦ Have I found ways to symbolize the new identity – organizational and personal – that is emerging from this period of transition? ♦ Have I given people a piece of the transition to keep as a reminder of the difficult and rewarding journey we all took together? (83-84)

Dealing with Non-stop Change (110-129)

It is a disconcerting reality that changes spin off from each other in a never-ending sequence—which means there are constant transition phases overlapping and being initiated. Bridges uses an effective analogy (111):

Your experience as a leader can be compared to that of an orchestra conductor. You have to keep track of the many different instruments, each playing different sequences of notes and each starting or stopping on its own terms. While you keep a sense of the whole piece, you must shift your attention from one section to another. It is important for you to hold in your mind the overall design of the melody and harmonies, for unless you do that, every little change will sound like a new and unrelated melody that just happened to come along, without any relation to the rest of the music. Then he encourages us to tie every change back to the underlying purpose of the organization by finding the larger patterns that integrate and make sense out of all the specific changes. (112)

Bridges' Nine Keys to Managing Nonstop Change

1. Foresee as Much as You Can (114) —First, do life-cycle forecasts on the organizational policies and structures that are currently in place. Second, he suggests life-cycle planning should be done for levels of employment, for areas of technical expertise, and for cultural understanding. While it may be difficult to convince those who believe that what isn't broke "yet" might still need to be fixed, forecasting allows you to proactively focus on the structures that will need to be updated to support the growth and progress of the institution. It allows you to be ready with alternatives or paths to explore when the first cracks are discovered.
2. Do Worst-Case Scenarios (115-116)—Build into every plan a "what if?" clause for the hurdles most likely to arise. Take time and bring in your best out-of-the box thinkers and have them help you think through all the possibilities.
3. Make the Transition to "Change as the Norm" (116-117)—Only if continuous change is normalized as the new status quo can it be assimilated. It is vital to understand that the point of change is to preserve that which does not change. The continuation of anything depends on its changing, just as staying upright and moving forward on a bicycle depends on making constant steering adjustments. Refusing to make those little changes would rapidly lead to a loss of balance and motion.
4. Clarify Your Purpose (117-119)—Stability through change demands clarity about who you are and what you are trying to do. Far too many organizational purpose statements are really descriptions of the organization's objectives. It is the purpose, not the objectives, that is the heartbeat of the organization. An organization's purpose is seldom tricky: Toyota's purpose is to build cars and related vehicles. Objectives enable purpose (increase shareholder value, etc.). People tend to more easily identify with objectives because it is easier to relate their own efforts and self-image to objectives, which are more tangible and

closer to hand than the overall purpose. Getting people to identify with an organization's purpose takes explanation, modeling and reward.

5. *Rebuild Trust (119-121)*— When people trust their leaders, they're willing to undertake change, even if it scares them. The good news is that you can build trust; the bad news is that it takes time to build it. Bridges points out that there are two sides to trust: the first is outward-looking and grows from one's past experiences with a person or group; the second is inward-looking and comes from the one's own history. As a leader, you have control over the outward-facing source, so start there. If you are struggling in this area, see also Stephen Covey's book *The Speed of Trust*.

Leadership actions that build trust:

- a. Do what you say you will do. Don't make promises you can't or won't keep. Most mistrust comes from past experiences of untrustworthy actions.
 - b. If for any reason you cannot follow through on a promise, give warning as soon as possible, and honestly explain the circumstances that led to your failure to do what was promised.
 - c. Listen to people carefully and tell them what you think they are saying. If you have it wrong, accept the correction and revise what you say. People trust most the people whom they believe understand them.
 - d. Understand what matters to people and work hard to protect anything that is related to what matters to them. People trust those who are looking out for their best interests.
 - e. Share yourself honestly (but beware of using "honesty" as a cover/excuse for hostility). A lot of mistrust begins when people are unable to read you. While hiding your shortcomings may polish your image, it ultimately undermines people's trust. Admitting an untrustworthy action is itself a trustworthy action.
 - f. Ask for feedback and acknowledge unasked-for feedback about your own trustworthiness. It may be biased (and you don't have to swallow it whole), but it is still valuable information. Check for important half-truths.
 - g. Don't try to push others to trust you further than you trust them. You will communicate subtly whatever mistrust you are feeling, and it will be returned to you in kind. Trust is mutual, or else it is very shallow.
 - h. Try extending your trust of others a little further than you normally would. Being trusted makes a person more trustworthy, and trustworthy people are more trusting.
 - i. Don't confuse being trustworthy with "being a buddy." Being a buddy for any purpose besides friendship is an untrustworthy act. Trust doesn't automatically come with friendship.
 - j. Don't be surprised if your trust-building project is viewed suspiciously. Asking people to let go of their old mistrust of managers puts them into a significant and dangerous-feeling transition. Their mistrust – justified or not—was a form of self-protection, and no one gives that up easily.
 - k. If all of this is too complicated to remember, there is a single key to trust-building: *Tell the Truth*.
6. *Unload Old Baggage (121-122)*—Leaders often find themselves fighting old battles (some possibly preceding that person's tenure) when transition starts. Transition is like a low-pressure area on the organizational weather map. It attracts all the storms and conflicts in the area, past as well as present, because transition "decompresses" an organization. Many of the barriers that held things in check come down. Old grievances resurface, old scars start to ache, and old skeletons come tumbling out. On the positive side, every transition is an opportunity to heal the old wounds that have been undermining effectiveness and productivity. It is never too late to become an organization that manages its people well. For that reason, the old scar and the unresolved issue are great gifts. They represent opportunities for organizational enhancement.

7. *Sell Problems, Not Solutions (122-123)*—People let go of outlived arrangements and bygone values more readily if they are convinced that there is a serious problem or issue that demands a solution. If a leader understands the problem and the employees don't, a polarity is immediately set up. If everyone recognizes the problem, it is likely to be solved much faster and more people will be encouraged to participate in the solution. It is ironic that involving people is sometimes viewed as too time-consuming for a world of rapid change. Actually, it is the authoritarian style and the command mentality that goes with it that take too much time—time spent slugging it out in an attempt to overcome each pocket of self-interest, trying to motivate people who feel that the change was forced on them, arguing with people who don't even know that there are problems. Selling problems is, in fact, the investment that pays long-term dividends by getting people more prepared for organizational transitions—and for a world of continuous change in general.
8. *Challenge and Response (123-125)*—Great organizations rise to power not because of their advantages, but because they treated their disadvantages as challenges to which they discovered creative responses. This can be used at all levels of an organization. Leaders face challenges and come up with responses and they can encourage their staff to do the same. This process can break the stranglehold of passivity that develops when staff and middle management see their jobs as merely carrying out the orders of those above them. New challenges can then call for creative responses rather than compliance. Challenge and response can restore a sense of ownership and purpose to people.
9. *Increasing the Organization's Transition-Worthiness (125-126)*—Bridges shares a team-building exercise as a model for this concept: a group of people are asked to rearrange themselves by birthday month and then further divides each group into smaller working groups by numeric days. The working groups then reflect back on how both individually and as a group they moved through transition—letting go of their old locations, milling around in a chaotic neutral zone, and finding a new location for themselves. He then has them process how the room arrangement impacted the process. What if there were heavy tables, immovable chairs, narrow aisles, an even larger group, etc. This exercise can open the doors to asking employees what current conditions and organizational arrangements are helping and which are hindering their ability to let go of the old, live with a confusing time in the neutral zone, and make a solid new beginning. If you've built an environment of trust, they will tell you. And if you listen and do whatever you can to make the organization more transition-worthy, it'll pay off. If there is a good idea that isn't feasible, share why that is the case, maybe even repositioning it as a future issue to be addressed.

Conclusion (151-154)

A great war leaves a country with three armies: an army of cripples, an army of mourners, and an army of thieves. – German proverb

Consequences of poorly managed transitions: Whatever results are gained through the changes we lead, a poorly managed transition can leave behind three serious problems: the survivors who have been wounded by the changes they have been through; those who are grieving over all that they have lost in the change; and those whose loyalty and ethics have been so compromised by their experience that they turn hostile, self-centered, and subversive.

The problem of traumatized survivors is seldom on the minds of the planners of change, but it cannot be avoided by anyone who must implement change or by the people who must manage the situation that results from it. This is why transition management is such a critical skill to develop; without it, leaders are going to

constantly deal with the painful aftermath of mismanaged or unmanaged transition. Bridges created the acronym GRASS to remember the results of this situation (152-153):

Guilt: As leaders we feel guilty that the changes we initiated caused people to get hurt. Staff who participated in unpopular or unpleasant transition also feel guilt for being a part of the problem. Guilt lowers self-esteem, morale, and the ability to engage. It can lead to overcompensation in either a permissiveness to make up for the earlier harsh acts, or an even harsher “blaming the victim” mentality.

Resentment: Everyone feels angry at the organization for the pain that transition causes. When yesterday’s changes leave such a legacy of resentment, today’s changes are undermined even before they are launched. Sometimes resentment leads to sabotage and the subtler forms of pay-back that organizations experience today.

Anxiety: A small amount of anxiety can be a motivator; however, in larger doses it reduces energy, lowers motivation, and makes people unwilling to take the risk of trying something new.

Self-absorption: Anxious people become preoccupied with their own situations and lose their concern for the organization, fellow employees, and customers.

Stress: There is always a stress-related increase in the rate of illness and accidents when people are in transition. Good leaders learn to counter the sources of stress. Creating stress and then trying to “manage” it is like trying to cool your overheated brakes. The only real answer is to stop overheating them.

These are the real and measurable costs of not managing transition effectively. The next time you think (or people tell you) that there isn’t time to worry about staff reactions to the latest plan for change, remember that not managing transition well is really a short-cut that costs much more than it saves. It leaves behind an exhausted and demoralized army who may consciously or unconsciously hinder positive outcomes and further growth. Unmanaged transition fosters an environment of distrust, resentment and low morale, guaranteeing management difficulties and stagnation. (153)

Whatever currently exists is going to change. What it will look like is something that the futurists can debate. The only certainty is that between here and there will be a lot of change. Where there’s change, there’s transition. That’s the utterly predictable equation: **change + human beings = transition** There’s no way to avoid it. But you can manage it. And if you want your organization to succeed, you must manage it well. (154)

This document was inspired by, and borrowed significantly from a summary of the 3rd edition, put together by Mark Elliot, Associational Mission Strategist, Heartland Church Network:

http://www.heartlandchurchnetwork.com/uploads/5/8/1/6/58163279/managing_transitions_3rd_edition.pdf

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