

## Managing the Changes and Transitions that Lead to Transformations

*The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right name.*

Chinese Proverb

### An Overview

Change and the transitional process that accompanies it, occurs as a consequence of *changing life-conditions*, or as a consequence of the *normal developmental process*. Both are a natural part of living in a creation that is evolving.

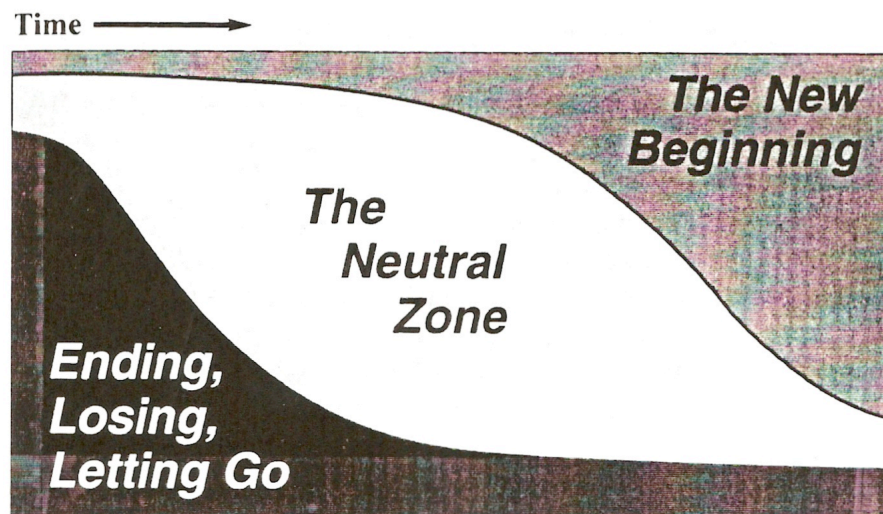
**Change** is situational; life-conditions change.

**Transition** is psychological and involves “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.”

**Phase One: 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 to deal with their loss.

**Phase Two: The Neutral Zone.** Going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn't fully operational. We call this time the “neutral zone”: it's when the critical psychological re-alignments and re-patterning take place.

**Phase Three: Beginning Anew.** Come 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.



With **change** one focuses on the outcome that the change is intended to produce. With **transition** the starting point is different; one begins with the ending that you will have to design and create in order to leave the old situation behind. Transition starts with an ending.

The failure to identify and get ready for endings and losses creates the largest difficulty for people in transition.

The neutral zone presents another challenge. If you don't understand it and expect it, then you are tempted to grieve the loss too long, or to rush through the neutral zone, thus bypassing necessary steps in the transition process. In the neutral zone one can be very creative. The normal fear that arises after change puts us at a fork in the road: One path is back into the process of grieving, and the other is ahead, through the necessary transitions, all the way to the end. **This is the process of transformation.**

The **grieving process** is full of "hanging on" through depression and anger, either internalized or externalized. Facing the loss head on and grieving well is important to do. Wisdom is naming it. The **transformation process** involves scanning for a new path, facing frustration and energy loss, walking up to the end of the road and surrendering. It also involves moments of **breakthrough** in which a new path is revealed and a higher level of consciousness is achieved. This is the process of gaining wisdom and maturity.

## **Management Strategies and Tactics**

### **Letting Go**

- 1) Some people have anxiety from past experiences about letting go, and that anxiety is retriggered right now.
- 2) Write out in as much detail as possible the details of the change. Specifically, what is changing and what will it look like when it is changed?
- 3) Imagine the change as the act of hitting a cue ball with a pool stick. Slam goes the cue ball into the rack of balls. What are the secondary changes that will occur as a result of your primary change?
- 4) Each secondary change throws someone into the Letting Go phase. Who else is going to have to let go of what?
- 5) Notice how many of these changes are not concrete, but are fuzzy and diffuse ideas and assumptions, etc.
- 6) Is there something that is over/ended for everyone?
- 7) Accept the subjective experiences of loss that everyone is having.
- 8) Anticipate emotional over reactions.
- 9) Acknowledge the losses openly, and with a great deal of empathy and sympathy.
- 10) Expect and accept the signs of grieving.
  - a. Denial is the refusal to perceive or face reality.
  - b. Anger expressed outright, or in passive-aggressive ways.
  - c. Bargaining with unrealistic attempts to get out of the dilemma of change and transition.
  - d. Anxiety about the uncertainty of what the next phase of life will be like.
  - e. Sadness expressed in so many different ways.
  - f. Disorientation manifested in confusion, forgetfulness and changes in patterns of behavior.

- 11) Act in the face of a loss. What can you give back to balance what's been taken away? Remember the lesson FEMA learned about not allowing victims of Hurricanes to clean up right away; those who were prevented from helping themselves became depressed.
- 12) Give people information right away so that they can gain control over their lives. Sparing them undermines them.
- 13) Remind people what is over, and what is not over. Core issues, principles, places, things do not change much over time.
- 14) Treat the past with respect.
- 15) Make sure some piece of the past is taken along.
- 16) Whatever must end, must end. Face it, and don't drag it out. Move smoothly, not recklessly.

### **The Neutral Zone**

- 1) This is the nowhere between two somewheres.
- 2) Some people have anxiety about past experiences in the neutral zone and that anxiety is retriggered right now.
- 3) Here people are disoriented, anxious, lose energy, are overloaded... all because of uncertainty.
- 4) Creativity from within, and from beyond, arises most frequently in this Zone.
- 5) This is the wilderness through which Moses led his people on the way to the Promised Land.
- 6) Create new metaphors in the midst of the uncertainty. "We aren't lost, we are on the way to something new."
- 7) Connect with others to combat the loneliness.
- 8) Beware false promises of immediate resolution!
- 9) Old patterns must be replaced by new. This is never done in a day. Patience is a virtue.

### **Beginning Anew**

- 1) Beginnings involve new actions, thoughts, and feelings. They involve new understandings, new skills, new places, people, and things.
- 2) Some people have anxiety from their past about new beginnings, and it is triggered right now.
- 3) There is a gamble that this new beginning will work.
- 4) People need Four P's in place: the Purpose, a Picture of what is being created, a Plan, and a Part to play.
- 5) Be consistent as you work your plan.
- 6) Celebrate your quick successes.
- 7) Create symbols for your new identity.
- 8) Remember, things start when the plan says they will, but the new beginning takes place much more slowly.

Special Thanks to William Bridges and his wonderful books, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, *The Way of Transition: Embracing Life's Most Difficult Moments*, and *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*.