

The Seven Principles For Dealing Successfully With Transition

The following principles were developed by William Bridges, author of *Managing Transitions* and other books on Organizational Transitions.

1. You have to end before you begin.

We don't talk very much about this fact, because endings aren't a comfortable subject. We sometimes act as though we won't have to let go of anything-or as though we may have to but don't care. The fact is that no one can develop a new identity or a new sense of purpose until he or she has let go of the old one. It is also true that if you can deal with these endings realistically and gain closure on the past, you will be able to move forward more readily and take advantage of what the future has to offer. If you forget everything else, remember Principle One.

2. After the ending and before the new beginning, there is a confusing in-between time called The Neutral Zone.

In between letting go of the old way and taking hold of the new, there is a difficult time that we have no name for in the English language, but that in Transition Management work we call the neutral zone, because it is in between the old and the new and is different from both of them. Others have called it a "journey through the wilderness" or a "time in between trapezes." It is a dangerous time when our lives don't work very well and we loose heart easily. We need to understand that it is normal to go through a chaotic interim between letting go and taking hold again and to be discouraged and confused by the experience. And it is normal to need temporary sources of support and control to get through this time.

3. That confusing neutral zone can also be a time of great creativity.

The same forces that make the in-between time difficult mean that our normal resistances to new ideas and new behaviors don't work very well either. For that reason the neutral zone is a potentially creative time. It is a time to step back and take stock, a time to try new things, and a time to view every problem as a chance to abandon outmoded ways and create more adaptive and effective ones.

4. While change can occur randomly, transition is developmental and full of personal meaning.

What ends in a transition is often not just a particular situation but a whole chapter and stage of development in one's life. Behind the scenes, a whole new life may be taking shape. This pattern is easier to see after it has happened than it is while it is going on, but even in the midst of the confusion and discouragement it is worth remembering that there is a meaning to all the distress and disturbance. Whatever the old way was, it was fine for it's time. But it belonged to a world which is gone, and a new chapter is needed for a new day. That's the only way for you to protect and carry forward the parts of your past that are valuable and viable.

5. Transition is also the primary source of personal (and organizational) renewal.

Life moves forward-not gradually, but with occasional jumps. These jumps are like comparable leaps in nature which release energy. That is why individuals (and organizations) so often come out of a painful crisis with new energy and new focus. Renewal for individuals or groups comes from going through transition successfully, not going off for a rest somewhere. Such renewal requires you to re-prioritize your activities and your commitments. It will probably require you to unload ideas and attitudes that are no longer relevant to your life and your career.

6. People go through transition at different speeds and in different ways.

There is a basic underlying pattern to transition that is common to all situations and all people, but every individual deals with it in his or her own way. People move through transition at different speeds, so that in any particular change they get strung out along the path of a transition like runners in a marathon. Some of these lead runners had a head-start; they are probably the ones that felt more in control of their fate than the people behind them do; and they may very well not be as personally affected by the change as those behind them are. So concentrate on using your own best strategies for getting through, not on trying to be somebody else.

7. Most individuals are running a transition deficit most of the time.

This is a serious problem. Too often we don't have time to complete the transition cycle before the next change strikes. This can leave us with unfinished business to carry along with us, and the next uncompleted transition can leave us with still more unfinished business. Sooner or later the load will get too heavy, and some apparently small change will bring our whole lives crashing down around our ears. The good-news side of this problem is that every time of transition is a chance to go back and finish up some unfinished business.