

## **Transition and Transformation**

### **I. Transition:**

#### ***The Way of Transition: embracing life's most difficult moments.***

By William Bridges. Cambridge, Mass: De Capo Press/ Perseus Books, 2001.

Notes and excerpts:

#### **What is the difference between *change* and *transition*?**

*“Although people talk a lot about how difficult change is, it is really transition that is difficult.”* In fact, both individuals and organizations use change to avoid transition that could actually *“transform their existence.”*

**Change:** is a situational shift:

- A promotion, new boss, losing a job
- Moving to a new house
- Having a child
- Losing a loved one

**Transition:** is *“...the process of letting go of the way things used to be and then taking hold of the way they subsequently become. In between the letting go and the taking hold again, there is a chaotic but potentially creative ‘neutral zone’ when things aren’t the old way, but aren’t really a new way yet either. This three-phase process – ending, neutral zone, beginning again – is transition.”*

*“Transition is the way that we all come to terms with change. Without transition, a change is mechanical, superficial, empty...”*

*“When we resist transition, we resist one or more of the three phases of its makeup. We may resist letting go of the old; we may resist the confusion of the in between neutral zone state; or we may resist the uncertainties of making a risky new beginning.”*

#### **Two kinds of transition:**

1. **Reactive transition:** the coming to terms with a situational change – an external change of circumstances. See list of examples above (see *Change: a situational shift*)
2. **Developmental transition:** *“...not triggered by an external change but which is produced by a natural, inner unfolding of those aspects of ourselves that are built right into who we are and how we are made.”* Examples: the transition of adolescence; the mid-life transition; or *“...any profound shift to a new way of experiencing the world...”*

#### **Transition has Six Functions:**

- **Reorientation:** to a new reality

- Personal Growth: evolving
- Authentication: finding, or rediscovering, your true Self
- Creativity: a special time of openness and opportunity
- Spiritual: traditionally central to a rite of passage experience
- Renewal: integration

**Both kinds of transition (reactive and developmental) are characterized by the same three phases: an ending, a neutral zone, and a new beginning.**

### **The three phases of transition:**

I. **Endings**: “...endings and losses are the commonest first sign that people are in transition.”

Endings:

- Can trigger off real mourning for what has been left behind
- You may feel depressed and miserable
- Dis-identification= who am I now?

Endings tend to be signaled by one of several experiences:

- A sudden and unexpected event destroys the old life that made you feel like yourself;
- The “drying up” of a situation or a relationship that once felt vital and alive;
- An activity that has always gone well before, suddenly and unexpectedly goes badly;
- A person or an organization that you always trusted proves to be untrustworthy and your whole sense of reality comes apart;
- An inexplicable or unforeseen problem crops up, at the worst possible moment, to disrupt the ordinary functioning of your life.

*They appear to us as disasters – they are actually signals that the transition process has commenced. An outer loss is... a surrogate for some inner relinquishment that must be made...*

Question: What is it time for me to let go of? (both inner and outer)

This isn't about changing external circumstances, but more importantly about letting go of identities, outlooks, attitudes, beliefs, etc., that are no longer serving us well.

II. **The Neutral Zone**: is “...that in-between time, after you've let go of your old life and before you have fully discovered and incorporated your new life.”

The neutral zone can feel: empty, lost, confusing, a dormancy, mixed signals, too many choices, uncertainty, not knowing, anxious...

*“The world fears a new experience more than it fears anything.*

*Because a new experience displaces so many old experiences...The world doesn't fear a new idea. It can pigeon-*

*hole any idea. But it can't pigeon-hole a real new experience.*

D.H. Lawrence

*"The neutral zone, as they say in children's stories, is where you find the treasure. But you can't go out prospecting for it, any more than you can decide to make an ending and put your old life behind you. Life makes those decisions..."*

*"The true use of the imagination is to decipher the present under its teeming incoherency and the anomalies of language... As for the Future, your task is not to foresee, but to enable it. All true creation is not a pre-judgment of the Future,... but the apprehending of a new aspect of the present, which is a heap of raw materials bequeathed by the past....Therefore let the future unfurl itself at leisure, like a tree putting forth its branches one by one. From one present moment to another the tree will grow, and when its days are numbered, cease to live. Feel no qualms.*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The neutral zone is a time of gestation.

III. **Beginning:** Finding the new way: no guidebook will produce this. This is: Listening to your heart: Renewal and re-birth.

*"When old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart; and where old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with it wonders."*

Rabindranath Tagore, Indian philosopher

---

## **II. Transformation:**

- a fundamental shift; growth; evolution; blossoming; the accomplishment, not the process (the process is transition).
- self-renewal that is the result of successful transition

Excerpts from: *Walking in This World: the practical art of creativity*, by Julia Cameron. New York: Penguin, 2003.

*“It is a spiritual law that when we are ready to transform, transformation will come to us. .. When we yearn to be different, it is not just our restless ego. It is our accurate response to the creative energy within us that is seeking a new venue for expression.”*

Our old, usual strategies for processing and understanding life, of living, are no longer working for us... we feel called to something different...

*“Call it open-mindedness or the willingness to be always a beginner, but receptivity and openness characterize the temperament of all great artists, and as we consciously foster these qualities in ourselves, we are given the chance to grow and transform --- not perhaps by large and immediate strokes but be small.”*