

How to Manage the Transition Experience

There are some things that you can do to help yourself get through this three-phase process. First, deal with the endings.

- | Yes | No | Have you... |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...decided what, in your life and work, is over and what isn't – what it is time for you to let go of and what you can hold on to? Endings have a way of feeling global, so it is important to identify what is still there. Also, without such sorting, you may be unclear what you are going to have to say goodbye to. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...used symbolic “boundary” actions and events to mark your clean break with the past and show that your present is really different from your past? These will serve to send important messages to others about what's different for you now - and to help you yourself understand, as well. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...sorted your losses into those that you can <i>reverse</i> , those that you can <i>replace</i> , those that you can <i>rebuild</i> , and those the you must simply <i>relinquish</i> ? You have some options. A loss is just the beginning. What are you going to do with it? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...actively (<i>proactively</i>) sought all the information you need to deal effectively with your changes? Ignorance leaves you powerless. Before you accept that state, push a little. Stick up for yourself. (You'd do that for a friend, wouldn't you?) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...accepted the necessity for going through a time of “mourning” in dealing with your losses? The anger and depression you feel are not only natural, but they are part of the healing process. Don't deny them. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...found symbolic “pieces of the past” to take with you into the future? These mementos will provide you with a symbol for what is valuable in the last chapter of your life. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...identified the continuities in your life and work situations and taken pains to strengthen them? Not everything is over, and the continuities are important stabilizers during this turbulence - except that you may be running the danger of taking them for granted or forgetting that they are there. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...used this point of ending as an opportunity to step back and look at the path you've been following, to sum up, to understand how you got to where you are? What is the message for you in this change? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...taken this ending as a chance to look at past endings in your life? Have you unpacked any old baggage that you find that you are carrying? Old unfinished endings and unresolved losses will make this one much more difficult |

Then, deal with the in-between time, the “neutral zone” between the way you were and the way you are going to be.

Control

- | Yes | No | Have you... |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...looked for ways to gain access to the people whose decisions are creating the changes or affecting your ability to handle your own transitionality? You can't make them stop, but you can often influence them more than you may imagine. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...established realistic levels of output for yourself and avoided undertaking unrelated changes, wherever possible? Don't set yourself up for failure. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...created check-points and short-range goals for yourself during the neutral zone? They will give you a sense that you are accomplishing something and that the transition process is still moving forward. |

Understanding

- | Yes | No | Have you... |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...learned all you can about the transition-process, especially about this neutral zone? AT best it is a confusing time, and the more you know about it and how it facilitates transition, the more bearable it will be - not easy, just less disorienting. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...actively sought out the information you need and collaborated with others who share your need? One of the hardest things about the neutral zone is feeling as though you are in the dark and can't find the light switch. You can probably do more to help yourself (especially acting together) than you imagine. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...pushed to gain an understanding of the decision-making procedure and the time-line along which the decisions will occur? If you can't know exactly what is going to happen, at least you may be able to learn how the future will be created. |

Support

- | Yes | No | Have you... |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...joined others in planning group-building events and experiences, both at work and outside the workplace? If your support group has been damaged, it has to be repaired. If it is gone, you have to find a new one. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...created temporary arrangements and agreements to get you through what feels like a “time in the wilderness”? You won't be able to rebuild your life quickly. But you can build some scaffolding you can stand on while you do the rebuilding. |

- ...taken this gap in the pattern of your life to rethink your career and your life? With so much up for grabs now, more things are possible than in more settled times. This is a time to let go and really brainstorm about all the things that you could do.

Purpose

Yes No Have you...

- ...built “getting yourself through the wilderness” into your personal agenda? That makes a lot more sense than wasting your energy trying to put the pieces back together again. The only way out of this wilderness is ahead.
- ...revisited the question of personal purpose? What are you trying to accomplish in your life just now? What brings pleasure and meaning into your world? Why are you here on earth? What is your personal mission? People who can answer these questions are far less likely to be devastated by the neutral zone than people who cannot. Besides, the answers may show you where your path is going.
- ...converted this purpose into a “picture of how your work and life might be”? Hold that picture in your mind. This is your “promised land” and focusing your mind on it will do a lot to get you through your personal wilderness.

The neutral zone is also a time full of creative possibilities.

Yes No Have you...

- ...taken the time to step back and take stock, to challenge your old answers and ways of doing things, and to look for opportunities to head off in a new direction...or are you rushing blindly ahead to “get through the change”?
- ...taken some time alone, preferable away from the regular settings of home and work? It doesn't need to be a long time? It's difficult to get a new view of things as long as you are surrounded by the old patterns.
- ...cultivated the habit of experiment during the neutral zone? Doing it in little things may lead to bigger things and bigger payoffs. Drive home by a different route tonight, spend tomorrow's lunch time in a new way, wear something tomorrow that you usually don't wear. Or try doing some new thing that you've been thinking about.
- ...studied you own recent work and life experience for “clues” to new possibilities that might be explored? Look particularly at things that you didn't expect to work as well as they did, or things that you expected to work but didn't. Look at “coincidences” and the natural patterns events seem to be taking. Look at everything, in short, as though it contained a “message” for you.

- ...tried brainstorming? One way to get a good, new idea is to get a lot of new ideas. Ask others for their ideas - and don't kill them by saying, "I couldn't do *that!*" Ask a couple of friends to brainstorm possibilities with you. Sit down and write out ideas in stream-of-consciousness fashion for ten minutes.
- ...found a way to go beyond *coping* with the change to find ways of *making the change work for you*? To do that may require you to look at your job and your career in a new way.
- ...started keeping a notebook where you record all the ideas and clues that you get? Use it as a place where you can think on paper. Neutral zone creativity is very ephemeral, and it can vanish without a trace if you don't catch it while you have it.

And finally, find ways to turn the neutral-zone possibilities into the next stage of your journey.

- | Yes | No | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| | | Have you... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...converted the possibilities that you discovered in the neutral zone into objectives and then laid out a backward path from <i>there</i> to <i>here</i> ? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...studied the plan and the path and decided what knowledge and skill you need to follow it successfully? Put together a "learning project" to get that knowledge and skill. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...found some low-risk settings in which to test and practice what you are learning? Find a mentor who can coach and advise you. Find places where you can study others acting as you want to learn to act. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...broken your learning/changing project into increments and laid it out along a realistic timeline? Mark the completion of each segment with a little reward for yourself. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...regularly reviewed your plans and introduced "course corrections" whenever events and experiences show that your original plan needs to be modified? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...focused your early efforts on achieving a few quick successes and used these successes to build your confidence in further steps? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ...converted each of these actions-toward-a-new-beginning into some concrete first step that you can take during this coming week? Action to accomplishment to increased confidence: that is the sequence you need to initiate now. |