

## Understanding and Managing Transitions

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### Outline

- Introduction
- Facts about transition
- Biblical examples
- Transition process/Stages
- Managing Transitions
- Conclusion

### A. Introduction

#### *Exercise*

What are your two key station highlights and challenges? What one thing do you look forward to?

#### *Breaking the Ice-*

'Who are **you**?' said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, 'I — I hardly know, sir, just at present — at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.'

LEWIS CARROLL

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*<sup>1</sup>

With your degree in whatever course you had done and successfully accomplished, you have added an experience that may be what the market place may refer to as “Irrelevant experience” for it may have hardly a thing to do with your profession. It is possible you liked it, yet you’ve got to move on. As for whether to further the experience or make use of the profession; to some it may not be clear yet, and even if it is, you have no idea how it is going to turn out!

The common factor is that you have all experiencing an ending, having a starting or anticipating a starting. And yet that is not the only thing happening in your life! You could at the same time starting or ending a relationship, anticipating marriage, or experiencing loss or sickness.

This is normally a confusing stage and many try or literally ran out of it either to the “Old good days”- Children of Israel as they thought of Egypt. or “the brave new world” Bridges calls them a dasher or a lingerer

It is for this or more that we have to look at transition.

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland* (New York: Signet Books, 1960). P. 47.

## Definition

“The process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another” It can therefore be described as **management** of change.

Life transitions are challenging because they force us to let go of the familiar and face the future with a feeling of vulnerability. Most life transitions begin with a string of losses:

### Exercise: What are some of the things do you think/feel you will miss?

- The loss of a role
- The loss of a person
- The loss of a place
- The loss of your sense of where you fit in the world

### *The Fears and Beauty of Transition*

Any significant loss makes most people feel fearful and anxious. Since your future may now be filled with questions, it is normal to feel afraid. We live in a culture that has taught us to be very uncomfortable with uncertainty, so we are anxious when our lives are disrupted. On the positive side, these transitions give us a chance to learn about our strengths and to explore what we really want out of life. This time of reflection can result in a sense of renewal, stability, and a new equilibrium

To be “up in the air,” as one so often is in times of personal transition, is endurable if it *means something* - if it is part of a movement toward a desired end. But if it is not related to some larger and beneficial pattern, it becomes simply distressing<sup>2</sup>.

With a focus on our transition of finishing i Serve Africa we'll focus on the inner and underlying process that is common to all transitions. That difficult process of letting go of an old situation, suffering the confusing nowhere of in-betweenness, and launching in forth again ... as is said by William Bridges

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<sup>2</sup> Bridges William, *Making Sense of Life's Changes Transitions* (Perseus Books: Cambridge, Massachusetts Publishing, 1933), P4

## B. Facts about transition

- ✓ It is inherently part of our daily life
- ✓ Transition has costs that accompany it.
- ✓ Some transitions are easy and to handle alone while others are too complicated and need the help of others (friends or specialists)
- ✓ Some transitions are quickly dealt with and others take long period of time before they are solved
- ✓ Transitions can be managed or mismanaged. When mismanaged they result into complications e.g. conflicts, sense of betrayal, great remorse, fear of the future, trauma, stress, etc.
- ✓ Transition (whether easy ones or painful, complicated ones) have something to teach about ourselves, about others and about God. Therefore, they are not inherently evil in themselves

### Biblical examples of handing over:

- ✓ The handing over by Samuel- 1 sam. 12
- ✓ Elijah- Elisha – 2 kings 2
- ✓ Jesus and the twelve – John 12- 21
- ✓ Paul and the Ephesian Leaders – Acts 20:
- ✓ Paul and Timothy – best summed in 2 Tim.3 : 10- 4:7

Let us have a look at one

### Understanding the transition process

The process of moving through a transition **does not always proceed in order**, in these nice, predictable stages. People usually move through the process in different ways, often cycling back and forth among the stages.<sup>3</sup>

We will be able to anticipate, know and appreciate what is likely to happen to us or is going on in our lives and respond accordingly if we seek to understand the transition process. Further understanding the transition process helps one to relevantly respond to the needs of other people around us

According to David Pollock of Interaction Inc., there are five stages – *Involvement, Leaving, Transition, Entering* and *Re-engagement*. In transition, you move from one place or state to another. Prior to this move, you normally are involved in a certain way. For example before leaving campus a Christian student would be involved in the CU.

### Transition process summary

Let's look at the diagram provided.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://ezinearticles.com/?Negotiating-Difficult-Life-Transitions&id=9419>

*Involvement* stage is characterized by a sense of belonging and achievement, status (with a defined role), and one is part of a group.

The *Leaving* stage: On receiving news that you are to move on to something new, one **consciously and unconsciously** starts to leave their present state. There is a mental preparation towards the actual leaving. With adequate planning, this is normally the time to relinquish responsibilities, have farewell parties and prepare for what next. However, it is also a time of denial, especially if the transition was not anticipated.

The actual *Transition* is a very draining and chaotic time. There is often a sense of emptiness and confusion, chaos and lack of rhythm. The sense of loss of the former lifestyle is real. One feels a total stranger due to the intense loss and many changes taking place. For a while you feel status-less and this is generally a very anxious time before things settle down again. How one handles this stage is extremely crucial.

Gradually you will begin to *Enter* into the new state or structure. Initially you start to relate with people on a superficial level. You must initiate relationships or else you will forever remain “sitting by the rivers of Babylon weeping about Zion.” Quite often you will suffer from loss of identity and grief. It is critical to focus on the grace of God at this stage. Life has to go on and so you need to consciously refuse to remain in the past. This I think will be extremely critical for us Kenyans after the General Elections – we will need to focus on re-building the nation rather than dwelling on the past.

Thankfully, with every transition there hopefully reaches that stage of *Re-engagement*. Eventually one gets back to that state of equilibrium where once again you have that sense of belonging, identity and responsibility. “weeping may last for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning.” (Psalms 30:5).

### **Some practical issues: What does it mean to us?**

#### **Tips for managing Transition**

Life transitions are often difficult, but they have a positive side, too. They provide us with an opportunity to assess the direction our lives are taking. They are a chance to grow and learn. Here are some ideas that may help make the process rewarding.

Accept that change is a normal part of life. People who have this attitude seem to have the easiest time getting through life transitions. Seeing changes as negative or as experiences that must be avoided makes them more difficult to navigate and less personally productive.

Identify your values and life goals. If a person knows who they are and what they want from life, they may see the change as just another life challenge. These people are willing to take responsibility for their actions and do not blame others for the changes that come along without warning.

Learn to identify and express your feelings. While it's normal to try to push away feelings of fear and anxiety, you will move through them more quickly if you acknowledge them. Make them real by writing them down and talking about them with trusted friends and family members. These feelings will have less power over you if you face them and express them.

Focus on the payoffs. Think about what you have learned from other life transitions. Recall the stages you went through, and identify what you gained and learned from each experience. Such transitions can provide a productive time to do some important self-exploration. They can be a chance to overcome fears and to learn to deal with uncertainty. These can be the gifts of the transition process: to learn more about yourself and what makes you happy and fulfilled.

Don't be in a rush. When your life is disrupted, it takes time to adjust to the new reality. Expect to feel uncomfortable during a transition as you let go of old ways of doing things. Try to avoid starting new activities too soon, before you have had a chance to reflect and think about what is really best for you.

Expect to feel uncomfortable. A time of transition is confusing and disorienting. It is normal to feel insecure and anxious. These feelings are part of the process, and they will pass.

Stay sober. Using alcohol or drugs during this confusing time is not a good idea. It can only make the process more difficult.

Take good care of yourself. Transitions are very stressful, even if they are supposed to be happy times. You may not feel well enough to participate in your normal activities. Find something fun to do for yourself each day. Get plenty of rest, exercise, and eat well.

Build your support system. Seek the support of friends and family members, especially those who accept you without judging you and encourage you to express your true feelings. A time of transition is also an excellent time to seek the support of a mental health professional. He or she can guide you through the transition process in a safe and supportive environment.

Acknowledge what you are leaving behind. This is the first step to accepting the new. Think about how you respond to endings in your life: Do you generally avoid them, like the person who ducks out early on her last day on the job because she can't bear to say good-bye? Or do you drag them out because you have such a hard time letting go? Perhaps you make light of endings, refusing to let yourself feel sad. Before you can welcome the new, you must acknowledge and let go of the old.

Keep some things consistent. When you are experiencing a significant life change, it helps to keep as much of your daily routine consistent as you can.

Accept that you may never completely understand what has happened to you. You are likely to spend a lot of time feeling confused and afraid. This makes most of us very uncomfortable. The discomfort and confusion will pass, and clarity will return.

Take one step at a time. It's understandable to feel like your life has become unmanageable. To regain a sense of power, find one small thing you can control right now. Then break it down into small, specific, concrete steps. Write them down and post them on your computer monitor or mirror. Cross off each step as you accomplish it.

Times of life transitions offer you the chance to explore what your ideal life would look like. When things are in disarray, you can reflect on the hopes and dreams you once had but perhaps forgot about. Take this time to write about them in a journal or talk about them with a trusted friend or therapist. Now is a good time to take advantage of the fork in the road.<sup>4</sup>

**1. Reject new commitments**

Since I'm still organizing things, I decided not to accept any new commitments. Sometimes it's not easy to say no to new commitments, but I've learned to say no without feeling guilty. In the past, I tended to say yes to new opportunities without thinking about the effect they may have on me. And more often than not, I ended up unable to handle them and failed to produce optimal results. I'm now more cautious and think in longer terms before saying yes to a commitment.

**2. Know what you want**

Sometimes it's difficult to decide which commitments to take when there are several options. But, if you know exactly what you want, making such decisions is easy. By knowing what you want, you can easily see which commitments are helpful to achieve your goals and which are not. You can then quickly make decisions when you need to.

**3. Maintain focus**

To achieve your vision, you need focus. I learned this the hard way. For years, I set goals and saw that none of them were achieved. It was terrible. So I changed my approach and focused on only one or two goals a year (now I set only one goal). Since then, I started to see significant progress in achieving my goals. My attention and energy are used on only a few things, so the chance of achieving them is much higher.

I apply this lesson to my current situation. While previously I could easily get distracted by various things, now I anticipate the distractions and avoid them in the first place.

**4. Maintain balance**

While we should focus on what we want, we should not be so obsessed by it that we sacrifice other parts of our life. Keep your life balanced. In my life, I always try to balance the four facets of prosperity: financial, spiritual, social, and physical.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://ezinearticles.com/?Negotiating-Difficult-Life-Transitions&id=9419>

## 5. **Anticipate unexpected events**

This is what I didn't do well. I didn't expect that class preparation would take so much time, and I ended up being disorganized for some time. I should have anticipated such potential busyness beforehand.

For instance, I didn't have ready-to-publish posts at that time, and since I didn't have time to write, I missed a posting schedule on my blog. What I should do is to always have some ready-to-publish posts which can be used in such situations.

## 6. **Identify the weak points**

To stabilize the situation as quickly as possible, I identified the weak points I should give special attention to. For instance, I noticed that there are some days in which I'm busier than the rest. By realizing this, I could better anticipate them in the future. Another possibility is there are certain things that take too much time to do. By identifying them, I can work to make them more efficient.<sup>5</sup>

- ◆ Accept the reality of transition as a natural phenomenon
- ◆ Get more educated on the new situation you are about to enter.
- ◆ Anticipate the loss that transitions brings
- ◆ Share your frustrations, uncertainty, fear and the nostalgia with closest friends
- ◆ Develop a positive attitude towards a new situation
- ◆ Knowing one's strengths, and weaknesses may help developing coping mechanism.

## **CONCLUSION**

Well managed leadership transition results in growth that is holistic and broad, progress and productive.

What we call the beginnings is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning  
The end is where we start from.

[T.S Eliot](#)  
["Little Gidding"](#)

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.lifehack.org/articles/productivity/6-lessons-on-making-smooth-transitions-in-life.html>