

Handling change

How to make the transition

Over the years I've written many words about change. Often in writing and speaking I offer up things to do during change, a method for flowing with the change rather than spending precious energy in resisting it. Change is more constant than nearly anything else I can think of.

Transition seems a better word for what we all experience at various times in our lives, those interludes between one version of how things are around here and another version yet to be seen. My clients are usually in one of these interludes; in the middle of something and wanting new or improved skills for dealing with that something. They want to get better at transition.

A great idea since it is inevitable that every one of us will be in the middle of transition many times in our lives. Transitions may connect to huge celebrations or wrenching loss and everything between. During the periods of significant change we can feel like we're fighting for survival, thrashing about in the white water where two rivers merge.

I'm in transition now. I just changed the nature and location of my professional practice. At the end of May I closed my psychotherapy practice so that I can focus completely on coaching—which in my practice is best described as transitional coaching. So now I have one office, at home. One phone number, my cell. A coach can be quite mobile and I'm meeting with clients at their offices, at coffee shops or other amenable spots. About half of the coaching I do is on the phone, always has been. So that's all working out.

A part of my transition is a move to Florida. My condo is on the market and when it sells I'll zip down to the Gulf Coast and buy one there. Within a bike ride to the beach—that's a key condition for the condo I purchase. Nearly all of my family members live in Florida and I look forward to being closer geographically to my kids, grandchildren, siblings and a slew

of nieces and nephews. I will continue my coaching practice part time there.

Since I coach clients through transition, I thought I'd better take a hard look at how I'm doing going through this. I'm checking up on myself and some of the key ingredients I think enable individuals and teams to lean forward and flow through transition.

Advance Planning

Transition works better if you have a blueprint in hand, one with lots of room for adjustment as you go. This is the reason I coach executives in their 50s to start planning for retiring – or rewiring which is a better word for the new vibrant retirement we all want. A few years ago I started planning for this shift in my life. What in my work and personal life do I want to hold onto in the next phase? What do I want to let go of? I took the online Retirement Success Profile that I offer clients. I participated in a group of peers and together we began mapping out the lives we want in the decades ahead. I identified the elements that add luster to my life. Once again I clarified my values and planned for them to be a part of Act Three of my life. All of that is paying off now.

Communication

For organizations undergoing big changes, this has to be at the top of the list. I've worked with leadership teams who had the mistaken notion that they shouldn't communicate much about the transition until they had all of the facts. Instead, from the beginning you need to be as transparent as possible about all phases of the transition. The transition will shock your system and everyone going through the process will feel a wide spray of emotions. Anxiety will be high and communication is the best tool you've got to bring down the spread of fear.

In the transition I'm experiencing in my solo practice, I needed to communicate early and often with my past and present

clients, with the state regulatory agencies, with my landlord, various vendors and referral sources. Those conversations began a few months ago.

Attitude

Is anything more important? When I was a kid we moved many, many times so I got used to quickly putting down roots and just as quickly pulling them up. Unconsciously during my childhood I developed a positive attitude toward change. Don't know why I got it but I do know I'm very grateful. To me transition is more exciting than scary. I expect that it will be messy at times and full of surprises. I've learned – well I'm learning – to let go of any delusions about controlling all the aspects of what lies ahead.

So even though sometimes I feel betwixt and between, I embrace the truth that we're always betwixt and between something. There are bittersweet moments and moments when I question my carefully developed blueprint. Then right away I remember this story I heard about Hamilton Jordan who died recently after a long battle with cancer (during which battle he was contributing to our nation as always). He told the story of a time when he was having inpatient treatment for cancer and saw a young boy in the hospital. The kid was pale and bald and looked exhausted by his fight with cancer. Jordan said to him, "Havin' a bad day huh?" The boy looked up at Jordan and said, "Sir, there's no such thing as a bad day."

I'm grateful to that wise young kid and hope he is flourishing wherever he may be.



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