

“Manage Change so it doesn’t Manage You!”

by Nancy Moran

A quote by R. Blitzer says, "The only person who likes change is a wet baby!" Do you agree with this statement? Most people are comfortable with the status quo and are resistant to something new and different. Many of us don't adapt very well to change, especially if it is unplanned or put upon us.

However, the majority of us know it's a significant part of our future success and happiness. We realize we must implement change in our business and/or personal lives to keep growing and moving forward. We know change is important -- to keep up with new trends, business needs, technology and demands on our personal life.

Organizations spend thousands of dollars attempting to implement change, but many times it is not as successful as planned. Individuals make decisions to change, yet never follow through with the commitment. Of course, we don't always have control over the changes that occur in our lives; so we may be on the verge of a change and not even know it!

We realize change is healthy and essential to ongoing personal and professional success. But just knowing we need to change does not always make it easy to face and accept the changes we experience. Many of us would welcome change; at least we like the idea of change. We recognize that change is a fact of life. And as Spencer Johnson's new book Who Moved My Cheese points out, the sooner we recognize the need to change and begin to take steps toward change, the better we will be.

So if we know change is inevitable -- and even good for us, why do we have a tendency to resist change? Is it really the change we resist? Or do we resist transition? What's the difference? According to William Bridges, author of Transition: The Personal Path Through Change, "In change, the event or situation is different. Transition is the experience of the gradual psychological reorientation process that you have to go through to make the change work."

Understanding the difference between change and transition is the first step to effectively cope with change. All change, be it pleasant or not, planned or not, requires transition to be successful. Dr. Bridges says change that doesn't include transition is not a real change. By having a transition process to manage the change, we have a road map to move from the old to the new. It helps us be reassured that we are changing from an old situation but have a new situation to move toward. Transition is a process that helps us create an open mindset toward change by providing a specific method to apply toward making a true change.

Then how do we transition to make the change truly effective?

There are three basic phases of the transition process.

1. The first stage is actually the **Ending**; it's letting go of the old situation. Without this, there is no transition. Letting go is difficult, even when you are eager for change. But it can be uncomfortable to let go of the past situation. Feeling sad is a natural part of ending something. This is a time to call on people you can rely on for support. It's important to have some ritual or symbolic act that will help you acknowledge what is over and make a clean break and move forward without the baggage of the past. You can have a party or ceremony; create a photo album or scrap book; or take some memento or meaningful item with you to the new situation. During this time, it is important to remember that *everything* has not changed; some things remain unchanged. Identify those things and remind yourself of them as you go through the change. And remember to give yourself the time you need to complete the process. We all transition at a different pace.
2. The second phase of the transition process is the **Neutral Zone**. This is the in-between state. It's "no where." It's not the old way or the new way. Author Marilyn Ferguson says "It's like Linus when his blanket is in the dryer; there's nothing to hold on to." It can be confusing and distressing. During this phase, it is important to remember CUSP:
C = Control -- regain control by establishing realistic objectives.
U = Understanding -- learn all you can about the change you are experiencing.
S = support -- join others who are experiencing similar changes.
P = Purpose -- know your purpose: What do you hope to accomplish? What is your personal mission? Prioritize your goals.
3. The last phase is actually a **New Beginning**. This is when we become familiar with and accept (but not necessarily like) the new reality change brings. New beginnings are usually exciting; and if we have

worked through Endings and the Neutral zone, we are emotionally ready for the excitement the new beginning holds. A good way to help you move into the New Beginnings area is to visualize the result. Imagine yourself in the new place and how wonderful it will be. Then when you are in the new situation, it will seem more comfortable because you've already been there for a while mentally.

So, if you have experienced a change in the past that you haven't brought closure to, if you are anticipating a change this year, or if you made a New Year's resolution that you're having difficulty keeping, consider managing the change using the transition process. After all, we are living in a world of constant change. As Edmund Spenser said in the 1600's, "The only thing that remains constant in life is change!" In the 21st century, that statement is truer than ever. Knowing you can have a road map to follow will allow change to be less threatening and you'll learn to embrace the ever-present changes of life.

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