

Chapter 3: The Transition

A transition is any significant life event that results in "an ending, followed by a period of confusion and distress, leading to a new beginning." From William Bridges, author of Transition.

Try the following exercise, which will help get a reading of where you are in the transition process.



Your Name: _____

Length of Experience in the industry: _____

One emotion that describes your current state: _____

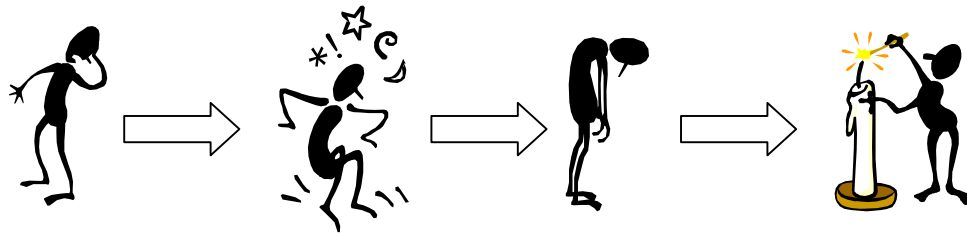
What emotion did you write down? Angry? Scared? Numb? Embarrassed? All of these are common emotions experienced by people who are in career transition.

It has been said that if there is one thing that you can depend on in life, it's change. From birth through graduating from high school, or getting your first job, there is an endless succession of changes in life. Every change that occurs in our life, whether positive or negative, produces some kind of stress. Getting terminated or laid off, or quitting a job, are some of the most stressful changes that happen in our lives. As living

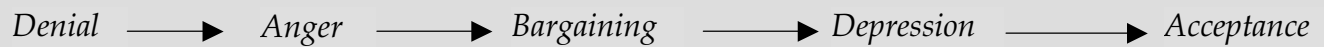
organisms, we are always trying to maintain equilibrium. In order to regain our balance, every person must go through a period of adjustment to a particular change that occurs in his or her life. How long or how difficult the transition period is depends on the person and the particular stressor.

The psychological adjustment to change has been intensively studied over the years by different groups of psychologists and career management consultants. Let's look at their models and see which might apply in your particular situation.

Transition Models:



Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' model from *On Death and Dying*:



All though Kubler Ross' model was developed in order to understand the stages of reaction to death and dying, any stressful change in life may bring up the same feelings. Of course each person may experience a particular change in their own unique way; for one person what may seem to be a slight rut in the road may seem to another to be the Grand Canyon!

William Bridges' model from *Transitions*:



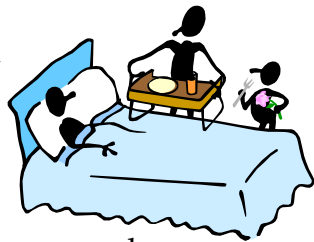
Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome Model:



All of these models present the view that, as a result of a traumatic or stressful event, people go through a transition period characterized by extreme emotional shifts. One could say that this is a process of healing whereby the person adjusts to a new state of affairs and finally regains a sense of wholeness and psychic equilibrium.

Your Healing Process

The loss of a job is certainly a traumatic experience and it is important for you to understand that the marked emotional changes that you may be experiencing are a natural and important part of the healing process. As you go through this process and make progress in your job search, you will naturally work through the different stages and start feeling like yourself again. However, just like people who have been through an event such as the Loma Prieta earthquake or the Oakland Hills fire, you may have remembrances or flash backs to certain events or things that people at work had said. It is OK to allow yourself to think about these experiences and analyze them, but if they are too upsetting or you find yourself dwelling on them, it may be necessary to put them out of your mind for a while. As the saying goes, "time is a great healer" and sometimes it is better to give yourself the time to gain perspective and then to reevaluate these events at a future time. There is a fine line in handling this, one that you must decide for yourself.



What to Tell Your Loved Ones

People close to you such as your spouse or partner, parents, children, or roommates can react even more strongly to the news of your transition than you do. You may find yourself in the uncomfortable position of having to console when you want to be consoled. Think carefully about each person's maturity, relationship to you, and life experiences. This will help you plan what to tell them, and how you want them to react. Parents who have worked for one company or the government their entire lives may not have the capacity to understand career change. They may blame you personally for the situation, as if you could stop the AT&T Board of Directors from insisting on a layoff! Don't bother trying to convince them. Just let them know that you are looking for a new job, and limit your interactions with them until the dust has settled. With your partner, try to explain that this is a time when you need extra emotional support.

Partners who depend heavily on your earnings, or who are uneasy about their own futures, may not be able to support you in your time of need. Others come through with flying colors. Make sure that you have more than just your partner to talk to about what's going on.

It is not fair to lay it all on one person. Children should be told that a parent lost a job, is a little sad or worried, and is looking for a new one. They will pick up on the emotions anyway, and do a lot better knowing the truth. But please, do not be like the Vice President we know who told his five-year-old boy that “Daddy was no longer The Boss.” That probably made the poor child think that his whole world was crumbling. The concept of The Boss to a child probably means a combination of The Protector, The Dad, Stability, etc. Don’t lay this on your kid, just stick to the necessary facts and move on.

will drop from the ceiling. Parents, put on your own masks first, then help your children to put on theirs.” Plainly, the reason they say this is that a parent who



has passed out from a lack of oxygen is not going to be very helpful to the children.

Similarly, a wage earning parent who is filling his days with non-job search activities or who is busy taking care of others is not going to be able to offer his family a paycheck because he not making the time to find a job. Now is the time to put you and your job search first and to organize your days based on this priority.



How to Fill Those First Few Days-Prioritize

After all the noise and anxiety of leaving the company is gone, the silence can set in. What are you going to do all day? When many people leave their jobs, they panic and try to immediately fill their days with projects: big, time consuming ones such as remodeling their homes, or building a deck. The problem with this is that it takes you away from the job search, which is now your job. Other newly unemployed people freak out about their finances and take immediate, extreme measures to save money, like pulling their children out of day care. One woman we worked with (who happened to be the most employable candidate we have seen in a long time—cutting edge software development skills) even canceled her girls’ swim lessons! When you are on a commercial airline, you will hear, “In the event of a loss of oxygen, air masks

Avoiding the Nightmare: Developing an Organizational System at Home

Can you imagine this happening to you? You hear about a job opening for a Vice President of Operations, and send your resume to the prospective company. In the resume, you specifically highlight your strengths and accomplishments to fit what the company is looking for. Ten days later, after sending your resume to over 40 other companies, attending BrassRing, and going on-line job searching, the phone rings at 7:00 a.m. It is a woman whose name you have never heard and she wants to ask you some quick questions about your background and your interest in her company. You stumble through the conversation, trying to figure out where she got your name, and what she is looking for. She asks you what you know about her company, and you draw a blank.

Avostar? Avistar? Autodesk? Axiom? You put down the phone to search for your resume file. Your two-year-old picks up the phone and starts saying, "Hewo! Hewo!" The dog starts barking. Is this a recoverable situation?

The answer to this question fortunately is "yes," but it will take time and effort for you to develop your own system in order to control all the information and communication associated with the job search. Analyze whatever system you developed at work, and decide if you can modify that to work at home. Set up a home office, even if it is a desk, p.c., and filing cabinet in the corner of the living room. If your spouse works out of the home, set up your space in a different room. Install your job search phone line so that it only goes to this area, and make the whole area off limits to family members and roommates. Set up a rule that anything related to the job search only goes in this area, or into your *Folio*. Take a field trip to the office supply store on your way back from the unemployment office, and buy everything you will need to manage the information and communication flow. Set up company information files, submitted resume files with the job descriptions stapled to them, contact files, and phone lists. Have plenty of paper; both copy paper for Xeroxing and faxing, and high quality resume paper.

Try a trial run of the system, from hearing about a company and jotting

down the information on a scrap of paper, to being able to track down the version of the resume you sent them and the names of all 9 of the people who interviewed you. Now might also be the time to check your technology: do you have a high-speed modem? Is your fax software up to date? Do you have a new printer cartridge?



How to Juggle!

Inevitably, a recruiter is going to catch you at a really inopportune moment. Do not try to answer the phone if you have been sleeping, even if it is 10:00 a.m. You will not come across well. If a call comes in at a bad time, simply tell the caller that you are on another line, and will call him back in 20 minutes. If someone catches you off guard, just put him on hold, take a deep breath, pull that company file out, scan it, then pick the phone back up. Never, ever, try to type on the computer, check your Email, or watch a television screen while talking to a networking contact or interviewer on the phone! No one wants to hear the following: "Uh, yeah, uh, u-huh, (tap, tap, tap), uh, what?" No one is scintillating enough to come across well under those circumstances. If you do not have your job search workstation in a room where you can close the door, set up an agreement with any adult sharing the home with you that if the business phone rings, that adult will gather up any children and immediately leave the area for the duration of the call.

Budgeting: Paying the Piper

People under stress tend to make impulsive, dramatic buying decisions in order to bolster up their bruised egos and give themselves some control. Outplacement consultants quickly get used to seeing clients drive up for their second meetings in new sport utility vehicles, and in hearing about Persian rugs purchased at auctions. Resist! Just



as large corporations do not let executives with jet lag sign contracts, you should not allow yourself to make any large financial decisions during the first few weeks after leaving a company. Just sit down and revisit your current budget, see if there are any minor cutbacks you can make in categories such as entertainment, then stick to your budget. If you need help planning your budget or discussing this with your partner, ask your consultant to sit down with you and do it.