

## Transitions

Transitions have been showing up no matter which way I turn lately. On the personal side, I have my 85 year old mother visiting from South Africa. My father died last year and just after she arrived she suffered a heart attack. She is not only still mourning the loss of my father after 65 years of marriage but she is coping with all that goes with having a heart attack. I, in turn, am coming to terms with loving and supporting my mother who is no longer the independent capable person I have always known. On the work front, a private company I consult for is gearing up to go public. This decision has brought with it much excitement as well as an intensified level of stress as the company goes through the vigorous due diligence process. These events have had me taking a closer look at how I manage transitions. While the events described above are transitions that others are directly experiencing, they are having the ripple effect of causing transition in my life. For example, the consulting role I have had in the company going public is changing considerably. As their needs are changing my role is changing. I am looking at where and how best I can help them meet their changing needs. I find that having an understanding of the process of transition really helps me to not only cope but to use the process as an opportunity to create more of what I want.

In his book “Managing Transitions”, William Bridges (May, 2003) has helped me gain a practical understanding of transition. He makes the distinction between change and transition. Change he says is situational, example moving from one job to another, while transition is the psychological process we go through with the change. He identifies three phases of this psychological process – The first is letting go of old ways. Second is going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new is not fully operational. The third phase entails making a new beginning, developing a new identity and discovering a new sense of purpose. As Bridges says, “Transition starts with an ending and ends with a new beginning”. I really like the positive, energizing spin of this view on transitions.

As I looked at these three phases as they relate to me dealing with my mother and also at how I can support my client as they go through the change from a private to a public company I have developed a set of questions and ways of thinking which I believe are helpful in moving through each phase.

Phase One – Letting go of old ways:

- In what ways am I holding on to the way things were?
- What grieving do I need to do in order to let go?
- How is holding on getting in the way of my coming to terms with the change?
- How am I thinking about the change? How is this holding me back from letting go and how is it supporting me to move forward?

Phase Two – Going through in-between time when old is gone and new not fully developed:

- I acknowledge this phase for what it is and so let myself and others off the hook for not having all the answers. Instead I focus on finding the answer to the question “What can I do to take care of myself during this time of ambiguity?”

- I have an attitude of curiosity and objective interest. I have the freedom to play with options and ideas without having to make any commitment yet to a specific course of action. Example – If I could have my ideal here what outcome would I like to see? What are the results we as a team would like? What are our options to accomplishing these results? If I were not concerned about budget, what would be the best course of action?

### Phase Three – Making a new beginning with a new identity and sense of purpose

- Who am I in this new place?
- How do I want to be?
- What is my purpose in this new place?
- What ignites my enthusiasm in this new place/position?
- What is my vision as I move forward?

While going through transition can often feel difficult and out of our control I believe our attitude, which is totally in our control, can not only help us to use the experience as an opportunity for learning and growth but to also discover the joy of new beginnings.