

Transitioning After the PhD
Presented by Sally Halliday & Kim Hellemans
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"It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transitions."
--William Bridges--

Change: A change is an event or experience that we talk about or describe to others. There are two stages to a change event: what used to be, and what is now. *Changes* (e.g. job promotion; divorce; moving cities) are external and easier to describe, *Transitions* are internal, and usually take more time to move through.

Transition: Transition is the psychological experience of change, and a more internal process that usually impacts your sense of *identity*. **A Definition:** A transition is an event or non-event that alters your understanding of yourself and the world. Transitions involve shifts in the way you relate to people, changes in your behaviour, values, beliefs, and assumptions about yourself and the world.



William Bridges Model of Transition

ENDING, LETTING GO: *"The end is where we start from."*

Expect: denial, disappointment, sadness, anger, fear, excitement. Can be intense!
Strategies: Name what is ending. Feel the feelings. Let go in order to move forward. Decide what you want to take with you, as well as what is possible to take with you.

How do you do endings? _____
How would you like to do endings? _____

NEUTRAL ZONE: *"A trip becomes a journey when you've lost your luggage."*

Expect: Disconnection from your previous identity - who am I now? Wavering, confusion, like wandering in the desert. Potential creative time. Daydream. Explore.
Strategies: Find a temporary structure - e.g. job, others who are in transition
Don't pressure yourself to make long term plans
Appreciate what else you have in your life that is not in transition
A good time to take stock, re-evaluate, stay in the moment and stay curious

NEW BEGINNING: *"Don't be afraid your life will end. Be afraid it will never begin."*

Expect: Excitement. Some anxiety related to competency "Can I really do this?"
Strategies: Positioning, and taking action. When ideas, opportunities come up, act on them, and ground them in reality. Change continues.

Looking Back to the Future: Consider these questions to consciously use change as an opportunity to make more meaningful choices in your life and career

- Think of a past change or transition point in your life that turned out well.
- What actually changed? Did something end? (Relationship, a role, identity)
- What did you have to let go of? What was the most challenging part?
- Was there a decision you made, as part of the change? What?
- What helped you to do that?
- What impact did the change have on your beliefs, your values, and you?
- What did you learn - from the experience? About yourself?
- *Now, reflecting on a current change you are facing: What can you apply from the above?*

Responses to Change:

We all respond to change differently. Here are some common responses and some suggested strategies to work more positively with change. See if you can create some of your own, based on your typical response to change.

Resistance to change: Acknowledge negative feelings, dialogue with them, and take an experiential view - try it. Change "I hate having to wear seat belts" to "I'll wear one and see how it feels."

Your turn: _____

Fear of the unknown: Acknowledge it; let off steam. Anxiety and fear grow in the dark rooms of the mind. Learn as much as you can about the obstacle. Change "I probably have to pursue further training to get that job" to "I am afraid but I'll talk to my friend who did the training last year".

Your turn: _____

Identify your real interests. Knowing who you are, your strengths, limitations, helps you to find a niche for yourself in new situations. E.g. Speaking another language, or having training in conflict resolution may give you extra value to an employer.

Your turn: _____

Hardened positions: Don't take a position so strongly that you will feel shattered when you have to retreat. Don't say, "I'll never change my mind." There is no limit to new information, new perceptions, and new options. Listen actively. Acknowledge what is spoken. E.g. "I thought I would never forgive her until I found out that she really didn't intend to hurt me."

Your turn: _____

Truth is relative. Imagination, intelligence and creativity are unlimited. How you see the world depends on your perception, the extent of your knowledge, the body of knowledge available at any one time. Spell out the problems in adapting to change. Clearly invent new options to adapt to new circumstances. Search for new truths.

Your turn: _____

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