

Three Phases of Transitions described by William Bridges in the books Transitions and Managing Transitions

Change is a shift in your situation. Change is an event. It happens relatively fast, and is defined by its outcome.

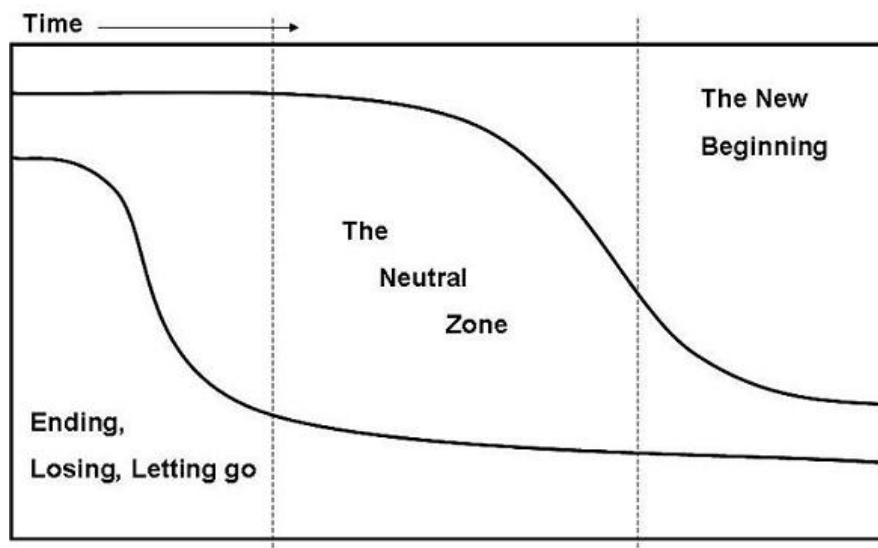
Transition is the psychological reorientation you make to come to terms with the change. Transition is a process, it happens slowly, and it is defined by three phases you go through individually and organizationally. These phases are often overlapping with a person or group experiencing a dominant phase. The three phases are:

(1) The Ending, Losing Letting Go

(2) The Neutral Zone

(3) The New Beginning

Three Phases of Transitions		
Endings	Neutral Zone	New Beginning
People discover they have to let go of what were normal, predictable and comfortable environments. They may feel a loss of control. Others may be genuinely optimistic. It is important to ensure people respect each other's perspectives.	As people go through the points of transition they can blame and become angry. People can feel uncertain, lost, afraid, "in limbo" or make unusual outbursts of frustration or anxiety. The key here is to be patient. Focus on going forward, not the past. As with Endings, those who are optimistic should continue to be encouraged.	People have chosen to commit and participate in building the new processes within the new environment. Now that they are more comfortable with the transition, they can become impatient for progress and may be hopeful about building new trust, relationships and achievements.
Identity: Have to let go of a static idea of "who we were"	Identity: Not who we were – Not yet who we will be	Identity: Begin to identify with the new ways.





How to Help People to **Let Go** During Endings

Before you can begin something new, you have to end what used to be. Before you can learn a new way of doing things, you have to unlearn the old ways. Change and endings go hand in hand: change causes transition, and transitions start with an ending.

Identify Who's Losing What – Notice that many of the losses aren't concrete. They are part of the inner complex of attitudes and assumptions and expectations that we all carry around in our heads. These inner elements of "the way things are" are what make us feel at home in our world. When they disappear, we've lost something very important, although to someone else it may seem as though nothing has changed.

Accept the Reality and Importance of the Subjective Losses – Loss is a subjective experience, and your "objective" view (which is really just another subjective view) is irrelevant.

Don't be Surprised by "Overreaction" – People seem to "overreact" to a change when they are reacting more than we are. But when we think that way, we overlook two things: first, that changes causes transitions, which cause losses, and it is the losses, not the changes, that they're reacting to; and second, that it's a piece of their world that is being lost, not a piece of ours. "Overreaction" also comes from the experience that people have had with loss in the past. When old losses haven't been adequately dealt with, a sort of *transition deficit* is created – a readiness to grieve that needs only a new ending to set it off.

Acknowledge the Losses Openly and Sympathetically – You need to bring losses out into the open – acknowledge them and express your concern for the affected people.

Expect and Accept the Signs of Grieving – Key to managing transitions are anxiety, sadness, and disorientation.

Compensate for the Losses – Ask the Question "What can I give back to balance what's been taken away? Feeling of control? Feeling of competence?"

Give People Information, and Do It Again and Again – Don't assume that information trickles down through the organizational strata reliably or in a timely fashion.

Define What's Over and What Isn't – One of the most important leadership roles during times of change is that of putting into words what it is time to leave behind. So think through each aspect of the changes you are making, and be specific about what goes and what stays. It takes time to do that, but undoing the damage wrought by any of these three reactions will take much longer.

Mark the Endings – Ideas?

Treat the Past with Respect – Ideas?

Let People Take a Piece of the Old Way with Them – Ideas?

Show How Endings Ensure the continuity of What Really Matters – Ideas?

How to **Support** People Through the **Neutral Zone**



A Very Difficult Time...Dangers presented by the neutral zone can take several forms: people’s anxiety can rise and their motivation can fall, people tend to miss more work than at other times, and old weaknesses, previously patched over or compensated for, reemerge in full flower, priorities get confused, information is miscommunicated because systems are in flux, and given the ambiguities it can be easy for people to become polarized – some want to rush forward and others want to go back to the old ways.

But Also a Creative Time, if you can help people through this phase of the transition smoothly you can build on all the confusion by encouraging them to become innovative. The road through the neutral zone is indeed rough going, but it is passable if you’re prepared for it.

Helping People Through includes:

“Normalize” the Neutral Zone – The neutral zone is like the wilderness through which Moses led his people. That took 40 years, you remember- not because they were lost but because the generation that had known Egypt had to die off before the Israelites could enter the Promised Land. It won’t take you 40 years, but you aren’t going to be able to do it in a few weeks either. The neutral zone is a time of reorientation and redefinition and it is the winter during which the spring’s new growth is taking shape under the earth.

Redefine the Neutral Zone – Possibly using a metaphor. Ideas?

Create Temporary Systems for the Neutral Zone – What new roles, reporting relationships, or configurations of the organization chart do you need to develop to get through this time in the wilderness? You would do well to set short-range goals for people to aim toward and establish checkpoints along the way toward longer-term outcomes that are sought. Ideas?

Strengthen Intragroup Connections – It is especially important during this time to try to rebuild a sense of identification with the group and of connectedness with one another. Ideas?

Using the Neutral Zone Creatively – Capitalize on the break in normal routines that the neutral zone provides to do things differently and better. Ideas?