

## Moving through Change with Ease and Grace

by Siobhan Murphy

Are you in transition?

Recently, I attended a professional meeting and fully a third of the attendees identified themselves as “in transition.” They meant that they are in between jobs. Yet, the other attendees could also identify themselves as “in transition” since we are all in the midst of a larger “Transition” from the old paradigm economy to a new one. I’ve been moving through my own transition journey from one model of a coaching business to another. It’s been challenging to remember my gifts and strengths during this transition.

While we can usually point to some event in our lives that marks a change, the inner experience often takes longer. Change can be identified by the event: the dog died, the baby was born, the stock market fell, the position was eliminated, and you got the job. The inner journey to emotionally integrating the change is a different matter altogether.

William Bridges, in his book, *Transitions*, identifies three stages that most of us experience in response to change: Endings, the Neutral Zone, and New Beginnings. Why begin with Endings? Because our energy has been tied up in the “way things were” and needs to be grieved and let go. We may experience sadness or a sense of loss when the familiar is no longer present.

The neutral zone is often a place of confusion. We are changing our habits from the old way to the new way. We’re not quite “in sync” with what to do or how to be. In new beginnings, we often feel a sense of excitement and we have moved through the loss felt in endings and the discomfort of the neutral zone. We get “in the groove”.

Imagine a potted plant being transplanted from its small pot to a larger pot. It has spent its sheltered life in the familiar surroundings of the pot it lives in. It has grown and become root bound. In fact, it cannot grow any further. Its roots are trying to stretch as the plant grows, but they keep hitting the confining boundaries of the pot walls, locking it in, restricting its growth. Eventually, the urge to expand and escape the confines of the pot it has always called home becomes overwhelming, and even the plant wants a change before it withers and dies.

A master gardener steps in to handle the transplant from small pot to larger pot. The plant is literally uprooted exposing it to the elements, away from the comfort, security and its life necessity – the soil it had been living in. It has no idea what’s in store. When the roots are swaying in the breeze, it’s hard to know where the edges are or to feel grounded.

Soon, the plant is in its new home. It is grounded and surrounded by life-giving soil and nutrients. It feels secure and it has room for expansion, more room for its roots, a more solid foundation. If a plant could smile, it probably would, because while the transition

from the smaller pot to the larger was not a pleasant experience, the final transformation made it all worthwhile.

Now imagine the journey travelled by a common garden insect in its transformation from caterpillar to beautiful butterfly. Its entire life is just one transition to another. To the caterpillar, who has had the freedom of crawling along the earth and up trees and plants, eating whatever and whenever, ending up in a restrictive cocoon must seem like the end of the world. The changes it undergoes are monumental, as in the chrysalis stage, where there is a complete change in the cellular make-up of the caterpillar.

In this stage, there is a sense of struggle and restriction. It can't move. It can't do anything. The urge to stretch its wings is so powerful, it pushes and wriggles and struggles, but to no avail. Getting out of that cocoon is a major exercise.

When the transition is complete, the creature will have more freedom and more ability than it ever had as a caterpillar – and it will be better looking! It went through difficult transitions, but a greater transformation was the result, and as it flies off into beautiful gardens, it probably doesn't even remember what it endured to reach that stage.

If we had cut the cocoon open to release the butterfly from its prison before its time, before it was ready, perhaps thinking we were doing it a kindness, we would have killed it. It wouldn't have been ready or prepared. It needed to go through that transition of stretching and wriggling and struggling inside the cocoon to strengthen itself in preparation for its new life.

Likewise for us, while our transitions may be stressful, we also have the opportunity to attain positive transformations and experience personal growth that will lead us to a new existence. The struggle is part of the journey.

This doesn't mean we have to like it or remain as motionless victims of chance and circumstance, because unlike the plant and the caterpillar, we have the intelligence and capability to influence our transitions and our outcomes. We might not be able to make huge alterations to our transitional circumstances, but we aren't necessarily powerless to do anything either.

Here are some strategies you can employ to help you through your personal transitions:

**-Maintain a positive attitude.** Focus on positive outcomes. Worrying will not change anything and will only cause you ill health, so why worry about things you cannot change – focus on the things you can change instead.

**-Identify where you are in the transition journey.** Just naming where you are can be helpful. “I’m grieving the loss of the old.” “I’m in transition.” “I’m in a new place and I’m not settled yet.”

**-Create a ritual to help with the ending.** There is wisdom in our rituals for the ending of a life that can be borrowed for other transitions. Consider holding a wake or funeral to say good-bye to what was.

**-Accept your feelings.** It is okay to admit that you feel vulnerable – we all do. Accept your feelings as natural and don't berate yourself. Compared to the length of your entire life, any challenges imposed upon you now are only momentary interruptions.

**-Read books about change to support your understanding of the process.** I especially like *Transitions* by William Bridges and *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Dr. Spencer Johnson.

**-Remember** that sometimes we have to knock down the old in order to rebuild the new. Challenges provide us with an opportunity to prioritize what is important in our lives and give us a new sense of perspective and priorities.

**-Look for opportunities** – seek out potential silver linings in your personal clouds. Some experiences really can be blessings in disguise. A lost job now can be the impetus we need to start our own business, which we may have been too afraid to do before. Need proof that even in the midst of transition and a challenging economy that it is possible to achieve success? Apple's iPod® was launched during a recession and now provides enjoyment and information for millions.

**-Keep the faith.** You are in the middle of a process of change that can lead to greater possibilities for everyone concerned, but you are not alone. You are sharing this transformational process with every person on the planet. Look around you. Who could use your support or even a positive word of encouragement?

**-Practice self-care.** Give yourself more support than you have ever given yourself before. The Transition process takes more energy from us and it's imperative that we replenish ourselves.

**-Get support.** Reach out to friends and loved ones. Hire a coach or a therapist if need be. You don't have to do anything alone.

Regardless of what transitions we are experiencing in life, it is important to realize the potential for amazing transformations waiting for us at the end, and remembering that nobody can dictate how we choose to respond to life's challenges or the attitude we choose to take.

If you are moving through a Transition, contact us to see how we can assist you to make the process easier and more successful for you and your organization.

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