



Thoughts from Linda:

Managing Transitions Making the Most of Change

William Bridges & Susan Bridges
1992, updated in 2016

"Things change, people transition."

This quotation from the original book by William Bridges is one I have quoted regularly to teams/groups/audiences over the past 30 years. It illustrates the significance of the human nature of psychological movement through different mental stages to cope with and ultimately embrace change. In my experience, the work of Bill Bridges does the best job of clearly explaining this phenomenon and effectively laying out his easy-to-access model for illustration.

This book is a classic and the most important one for every leader. His entire body of work is extremely useful for all individuals in families, organizations, and communities to understand change and how we all experience the journey through transitions.

As Susan Bridges notes in this new edition, "Adapting to the realities of this new world, leaders are confronted with a serious problem: in a quickly transforming landscape, they must be able to move their organizations from an initial idea to a full-scale implementation with little to no time for employees to adjust to the new way of doing things." We know the truth of this statement, and most of us realize the nature of our VUCA world (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous). Never has there been a greater need for leaders of all types to understand the key distinctions illustrated by this couple's work.

The author notes that the messages from that classic 1992 edition need to be re-discovered by today's leaders. As she says, "...the good news is that while the changes we are facing (today) differ from any we've experienced before, the transition process by which people get through change is well-mapped. There are many things about this new world that we cannot yet understand, but we do know what change does to people and how to help them get through it.

It is helpful to remember the essential insight from the very first book, **Transitions**:
Chaos isn't a mess, but rather it is the primal state of pure energy to which the person returns for every true new beginning...."

William Bridges was raised in New England, earning a BA in English from Harvard. He earned a MA in history from Columbia and a Ph.D. in American Civilization from Brown University. His life experiences of transition proved to be the catalyst for his studies and insights into change. As an observer and thinker whose knowledge and skills bridged many disciplines, he carved out a distinctive career path based on his passions and interests. He was an American Literature professor at Mills College in California during the 1960s before taking a sabbatical from teaching to explore literature psychology. His expertise in transcendentalist literature led him to humanistic psychology, which emphasized the inherent human drive for authenticity and spiritual development. He immersed himself in psychology and human potential, becoming the first President of the Society for Humanistic Psychology. He later resigned from his role in teaching and formed a consulting group, subsequently writing several seminal books on the topic of change and transition.

Susan Bridges joined Bill Bridges in the business, and later they were married and collaborated in their consulting business. Today, she carries his legacy as President of the William Bridges Associates organization and contributed to this latest edition. She holds a BA in Speech and a MA in Communications, with an emphasis in Neurolinguistics and Neuropsychology, from the University of Colorado.

There is a lovely *Forward* written by Patrick Lencioni and an *Afterward* written by Steven Kilban, the Founding Executive Director of the Andrus Family Fund. Both provide fascinating insights into the practicality and high impact of this work. While Lencioni can convey the impact on his work in consulting, Kilban relays the story of his encouragement to William Bridges to consider the entire realm of philanthropy where family wealth can 'do good' in the world. The book is divided into four sections and includes nine chapters and a very handy set of five appendices, which serve as 'how to' guides, with tips, checklists, and concise advice for individuals, teams, and leaders.

As they note in the chapter entitled, *It Isn't the Changes That Do You In*, "It isn't the changes that do you in; it's the transitions. They aren't the same thing. Change is situational...where transition, on the other hand, is psychological. It is a 3-phase process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about." They go on to essentially relate the learnings and insights from the original book, focusing on the three phases:

Phase 1—*Ending, Losing, Letting Go*—All change begins with loss, and this alone is such a key principle. The first phase of transition then requires acknowledgment of what is ending, and it is the time when we need to help people deal with their losses.

Phase 2—*The Neutral Zone* is that 'in-between time' when the old is gone, but the new isn't fully developed or in operation. It is that period when something has ended, and a new beginning has yet to emerge. Bridges named this "The Neutral Zone" and devoted good space in the book to it. As he notes, "this is where the critical psychological realignments and repatterning take place." Bridges advocated that people spend time here to make a psychological transition from an ending to a new beginning. The neutral zone is a threshold state that exists between the old life and the new, standing apart from everyday life. Reaching it requires going deeply within oneself and keeping still enough to hear one's inner signals.

Phase 3—*The New Beginning* includes the process of moving out of the neutral zone and making a new start. In this phase, people develop a new identity and experience new energy. They can discover a new sense of purpose as they embrace the work/situation in a new and positive way.

This edition of the classic version is well arranged and offers a clear map for anyone leading change. It also has a series of amazingly appropriate quotations for each situation. Here are just a few for contemplation, reflecting on each of the three phases.

Every beginning is a consequence. Every beginning ends something. Paul Valery, French poet

One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time. Andre Gide, French Novelist

The only joy in the world is to begin. Cesare Pavese, Italian Writer

I hope you begin this book and enjoy it as I have over the years.