Managing Transitions 4ᵗʰ Edition:
Making the Most of Change
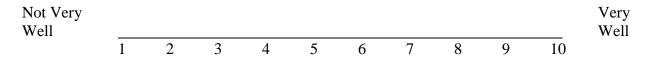By William Bridges with Susan Bridges

I am updating this discussion summary to match the relatively minor changes in the 4ᵗʰ Edition. It continues to be quite different from the discussion summaries I have done with previous books. Bridges' work has such broad implications (applications in the personal, church/association, and cultural realms) that it creates a much longer processing piece. A second reason was that at the time I did the 3ʳᵈ Edition I was experiencing tremendous change at all three levels of my life: First, on the personal level I lost my wife to a sudden and unexpected infection. Second, our association was in the middle of historic shifts in how Southern Baptists support church planting and church health. And third, our nation was experiencing radical cultural shifts—one simple example is that during the writing process the Supreme Court declared same sex marriage as legal.

As I update this piece for the 4ᵗʰ Edition those same three areas of my life are experiencing change: God comforted me, helped me through the grief process, and led me to a wonderful widow lady who is now my wife. Our association went through a strategic planning process that involved significant change and set us on track for a successful five years of growth. In the next few months we will embark on the process for setting directions for the next five years which will include leadership transition as I move to retirement. The principles in this book helped us to navigate those changes. On the national level I will simply state that in my opinion our nation is more polarized than it has been since the mid 1800s—even constructive and necessary change will be difficult.

Question: So, having bared my soul, let me ask that before you even start to read this piece, take a few minutes to reflect on what changes you see taking place in your life, your ministry, and in your community. You might want to add significant changes that have occurred in the last two years.

- Changes in my life include:

- Changes in my ministry include:

- Changes in my community include:

Q: On a scale of one to ten how well are you dealing with all these changes?

Not Very   Very
Well   Well
            1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Introduction

It has been twenty-five years since the publication of the first edition of *Managing Transitions.* In working with organizations and individuals over the years, we've heard everyone talk about

how much faster change is occurring. Indeed, many people feel that they have never before experienced the types of unprecedented changes that they are now.

We know that managing people and organizations during times of tumultuous change is one of the most difficult tasks a leader faces…During such times, a leader might be tempted to take short cuts, to focus on new vehicles for accomplishing quick results. We caution against that.

But the good news is that while the changes we are facing differ from any we've experienced before, the transition process by which people get through change is well-mapped…In managing the transitions that flow from the changes, we have a set of oars that is tried and true.

First, the results you are seeking depend on getting people to stop doing things the old way and getting them to start doing things a new way. And since people have a personal connection with how they work, there is just no way to do that impersonally.

And second, transition management is based on some abilities you already have and some techniques you can easily learn…it is a way of dealing with people that makes everyone feel more comfortable.

We have learned how self-defeating it is to try to overcome people's resistance to change without addressing the threat the change poses to their world.

Practicing transition management skills taps into innate wisdom that you have sharpened through the years, and gives tools and methods for learning new ways. Understanding this will give you the opportunity to lead with confidence, communicate with clarity, and reassure your people that they are following a roadmap. Employees can take comfort in the message that we've been here before. (pages xiii-xv)

> Processing Activity: What are some of the principles of change and transition that the authors identify in their introduction?

The ones I saw are:
- Changes are inevitable.
- The rate of change is accelerating.
- The types of changes we are experiencing today are unprecedented.
- Although even the best leaders cannot anticipate all the changes that are coming, all leaders can improve their effectiveness in helping their organization through the transition process.
- Effective leaders understand the relational side of organizational life and during transitions they elevate rather than neglect those personal connections.
- Effective transition management requires a leader to understand and address the personal threat that the current change is causing their team members.
- As a leader you cannot always tell your team, "We are on top of every change that comes our way," but you can tell them "We've successfully dealt with change before, and if we manage this transition properly, we will come out stronger in the end."
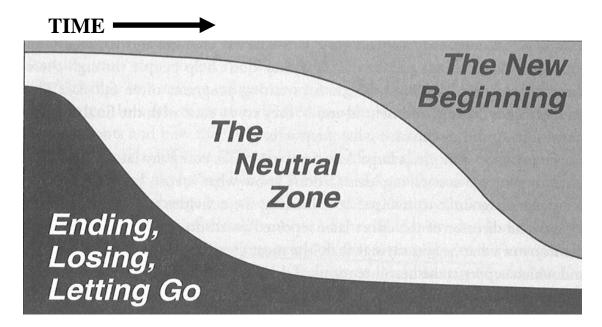
The book is broken down into four parts: The Problem, The Solution, Dealing with Nonstop Change in the Organization and Your Life, and The Conclusion. It also comes with five very practical appendices.

<p style="text-align:center">PART ONE: THE PROBLEM</p>

Chapter One: It Isn't the Changes That Do You In

A. The chapter begins with a Chinese proverb: "The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names." The authors then promptly define the words CHANGE and TRANSITION. "Change is situational: the move to a new site, a new CEO replaces the founder, the reorganization of the roles on the team, and new technologies. Transition, on the other hand is psychological; it is a three-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…When change happens without people going through a transition, it is just a rearrangement of the chairs."

Understanding the three-phase process is worth the price of the book. And because a picture is worth a thousand words, here is how they picture that process:

TIME ➡️

The three phases are:
1. Ending—Letting go of the old ways and the old identity people had. This first phase of transition is an ending and the time when you need to help people deal with their losses.
2. Neutral Zone—Going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn't fully operational. It's when the critical psychological realignments and repatternings take place.
3. Beginning—Coming out of the transition and making a new beginning. This is when people develop the new identity, experience the new energy, and discover the new sense of purpose that makes the change begin to work.

Because transition is a process by which people unplug from an old world and plug into a new world, we can say that transition starts with an ending and finishes with a beginning. (pages 3-5)

> Processing Questions: Would you agree with the authors that although we often use them interchangeably, change and transition are very different? Why or why not?

Q: Take a minute and think about a specific and significant change that is taking place right now in your life or in your ministry—one that you did not initiate. Can you see all three phases?

Q: Looking at a current change that is taking place in your ministry setting, can you see where your team members are in the transition process? How about yourself?

Q: Take a few more minutes to reflect on each of these three phases. What personal adjustments have you had to make and what emotions have you felt during this transition experience?

As I read this section for the first time, I was personally experiencing a significant number of changes both personally and professionally. Some that I was initiating as a leader and several that I had to lead others to accept while I was transitioning with them. As I was wrapping up this discussion summary I experienced the sudden and untimely death of my wife— sociologists say it is THE most challenging transition in life. As such, I thought the term "Neutral Zone" was not a strong enough term to describe the emotions that could be present in a major change situation. At first, I called it the DMZ (de-militarized zone) and then later settled on the term "Disputed Territory" to reflect the deep emotions and push backs that I experienced and observed.

Q: As a ministry leader, how will taking time to reflect on your personal experience with change and the transitions that they bring help you be more effective as you lead your leadership team and your ministry through transitions?

Activity: Ask your team members for honest feedback on how they worked through the three phases as it relates to a recent change you initiated.

B. Several important differences between change and transition are overlooked when people think of transition as simply gradual or unfinished change or when they use change and transition interchangeably. With a change, you naturally focus on the outcome that the change produces. If you move from California to New York City, the change involves crossing the country and then learning your way around the Big Apple.

Transition is different. The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome but the ending that you'll have to make to leave the old situation behind. Situational change hinges on the new thing, but psychological transition depends on letting go of the

> *Unmanaged transition makes change unmanageable.*

old reality and the old identity you have before the change took place. Organizations overlook that letting-go process completely, and do nothing about the feelings of loss that it generates. And in overlooking those effects, they nearly guarantee that the transition will be mismanaged and that, as a result, the change will go badly. Unmanaged transition makes change unmanageable.

Transition starts with an ending. That is paradoxical, but true…The failure to identify and get ready for endings and losses is the largest difficulty for people in transition. And the failure to provide help with endings and losses leads to more problems for organizations in transition than anything else…Once you understand that transition begins with letting go of something, you have taken the first step in the task of transition management. (pages 7-9)

Q: How would you describe the paradoxical concept that "transition starts with an ending" to someone who has not read the book?

Q: As you reflected back on a recent personal experience with transition, what were some of the things that you had to "let go" before you could complete the change process? Are there still some things that you need to let go?

C. The second step is understanding what comes after the letting go: *the neutral zone*. This is the psychological no-man's–land between the old reality and the new one.

It is important for people to understand and not be surprised by this neutral zone, for several reasons. First, if you don't understand and expect it, you're more likely to try to rush through or even bypass the neutral zone. You may mistakenly conclude that the confusion you feel is a sign that something is wrong with you.

Second, you may be anxious in this no-man's-land and try to escape. (Employees do this frequently, which is why there is often an increased level of turnover during organizational changes.)

Third, if you escape prematurely from the neutral zone, you'll not only compromise the change but also lose a great opportunity. Painful though it is, the neutral zone is the individual's and the organization's best chance to be creative, to develop into what they need to become, and to renew themselves. The neutral zone is thus both a dangerous and an opportune place, and it is the very core of the transition process.

Calling them "phases" makes it sound as though they are lined up like cubicles. Perhaps it would be more accurate to think of them as three processes and to say that the transition cannot be completed until all three have taken place. (pages 9-10)

Q: As ministry leaders, we work primarily with volunteers. Bridges points out that employee turnover increases during transitions. So if employees, who are paid, often leave during transitions, what will happen to your ministry if you don't lead change and transitions well?

Q: Does this reality heighten your interest in the principles identified in this book? If not, why not?

Q: Think back to t time when "you escaped." What would have helped you to stay and complete the transition?

Chapter Two: A Test Case

The chapter opens with the quotation, "We think in generalities, but we live in detail." The quote brought to my mind the old cliché, "the devil's in the details." The author's noted that "Chapter 1 was fairly theoretical. Unless you understand the basic transition model, you won't be able to use it. But only in actual situations can you use it." (page 13)

This chapter provides an excellent example from the corporate world of a major change that didn't go well, because leaders didn't manage the personal impact on employees. It then suggests a number of actions that "could be taken" to improve the situation and asks the reader to rate the importance of each possible action on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being do it NOW and 5 being don't do it at all.

Q: If you have the book and worked through the exercise, how well did your responses align with the author's?

Processing Activity: Select a current change that is impacting your life. Begin a list of all the various things you could do to help yourself, your team, and your ministry to manage the resulting transition. As you continue to read the book and/or work through these processing questions, keep adding to your list additional action items as well as notes next to each action indicating what level of response it should be (1-5) and why.

PART TWO: THE SOLUTIONS

Chapter Three: How to Get People to Let Go

A. Bridges opens the chapter with the realities that "Before you can begin something new, you have to end what used to be, [and] people don't like endings." (page 27)
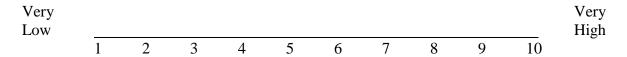
To these realities, I would add two personal observations: people have differing levels of tolerance to change and people want their church to be a haven of rest and stability in our chaotic world. Both of these realities create additional difficulties for churches and ministries seeking to make necessary changes. Most pastors and ministry leaders are "people pleasers" and do not desire to offend nor do they like to lose members. So when they encounter people in significant leadership positions whose tolerance for change is very low, they can become too cautious. There are a few people in every church who will be opposed to almost ANY change a pastor will suggest. These individual's willingness to change is so limited that even after a change has been made, is fantastically successful, and has sustained that success for years, they will still only begrudgingly admit that the "new idea isn't as bad as they thought it was going to be." Effective leaders are change agents, so they can't wait for every member to

be ready. But they cannot be like the people who are at the opposite end of the spectrum. There are some people in your church (and I've met a few pastors in this category) who will hear a new idea and wonder why it wasn't implemented last month. And they are willing to accept it BEFORE they even fully understand what the change is or what its implications might be for the church.

My second observation is that in general church members want their church to be a safe haven. They want it to be a place where they can escape the chaos of everyday life. Yes, there are a handful of churches in the world that have a core value of being flexible so they will be able to meet changing needs, but it's probably not YOUR church.

These two observations magnify the author's statement that "people don't like endings." Remember he is writing primarily for a business audience working with employees and not the ministry world where leaders are working primarily with volunteers.

Q: How would you describe your tolerance for change?

Very
Low
<div style="text-align:right">Very
High</div>

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Action Item: Next time your leadership team meets, discuss the concept of a "personal tolerance for change" and have each individual describe theirs. Also ask, "are there certain types of changes that you can tolerate better?"

B. I believe you can become a more effective change agent, if you will effectively process the information in this chapter. Here are the section headings for the chapter:
- Identify Who's Losing What
- Accept the Reality and Importance of the Subjective Losses
- Don't Be Surprised at Overreaction
- Acknowledge the Losses Openly and Empathically
- Expect and Accept the Signs of Grieving
- Compensate for the Losses
- Give People Information, and Do It Again and Again
- Define What's Over and What Isn't
- Mark the Endings
- Treat the Past with Respect
- Let People Take a Piece of the Old Way with Them
- Show How Endings Ensure the Continuity of What Really Matters

Action Item: Think about a change you tried to implement as a leader that didn't go well. Review the list above and identify one or two things that you think might have contributed most to that failure. As you read and review those particular sections, take special note of Bridges suggestions.

C. Under the "Identify Who's Losing What" section he suggests that an effective leader will take time to answer five critical questions:

Q: What is actually going to change? Be specific and describe the change in as much detail as you can.

Q: What are the secondary changes that your change will probably cause? And what are the future changes that those secondary changes will cause?

Q: Who is going to have to let go of something and what are those things?

Q: How many of the changes are concrete and how many are emotional and subjective?

Q: Is there something that is over for everyone? (pages 29-30)

D. In his "Accept the Reality and Importance of the Subjective Losses" section he states, "You won't get people's commitment unless you understand them and make decisions based on that understanding. So however you do it, learn who is experiencing a loss of some kind and what it is they are losing."

In a somewhat related section entitled "Don't Be Surprised at Overreaction" he encourages us to remember two things: "first, that changes cause 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, and we often react that way ourselves when it's part of our own world that is being lost…Overreacting also comes from the experience that people have had with loss in the past…Overreactions also take place when a small loss is perceived as the first step in a process that might end with removing the grievers themselves. Someone whose job seemed secure is dismissed, and 100 coworkers begin to wonder, Am I next?" (pages 31-32)

Q: Think of a time when you over reacted. What were the reasons you responded as you did?

And in a third section called "Acknowledge the Losses Openly and Sympathetically," Bridges states, "You need to bring losses out into the open—acknowledge them and express your concern for the affected people. Do it simply and directly…it is not talking about a loss but rather pretending that it doesn't exist that stirs up trouble…research on what helps people recover from loss agrees that they recover more quickly if the losses can be openly discussed." (pages 31-32)

Action Item: Take time to reflect on a current change that you are either contemplating or have recently initiated in your ministry. Review the principles above and ask yourself how well you have applied them. What specific actions could you take in the days ahead to help yourself and others to work through the transition process that the change has created?

E. The next section in the chapter is entitled "Expect and Accept the Signs of Grieving." Bridges points out that we will find the stages of grief "in families that have lost a loved one, and you find them in an organization where an ending has taken place." Most ministry leaders are familiar with these:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Disorientation
- Depression

And in a related section, "Compensate for the Losses," he writes, "No pain no gain, they say. But many change efforts fail because the people affected experience only the pain. As a leader you may know that in the long run the ministry will experience gain, but too often for the volunteers who are part of your team, it can seem to be all loss—they are only feeling the pain. Trying to talk them out of their feelings will get you nowhere. Find a way to act…Ask, What can I give back to balance what's been taken away? (pages 32-36)

Q: Think through a recent major change that you experienced that was not self-initiated. Did you experience some of the "signs of grief?" Did you feel like you lost more than you gained in the process? What things could the person or people who initiated the change have done to make your situation better.

Q: Think through the Biblical transition between Samuel as the last judge and Saul as the first king. What did the people gain and what did they lose in that process?

F. "Give People Information, and Do It Again and Again" is the next section. It opens with the statement, "There are lots of rationalizations for not communicating. Here are some common ones:

- They don't need to know yet. We'll tell them when the time comes. It'll just upset them now.
- They already know. We announced it—threatening information is absorbed remarkably slowly. Find different ways to say it and different media in which to say it
- I told the [ministry leaders]. It's their job to tell [their team].
- We don't know all the details yet ourselves, so there's no point in saying anything until everything has been decided. (pages 36-37)

In an effort to protect people sometimes ministry leaders "substitute a fabrication of half-truths and untruths. Not only do these later turn out to be outright lies, but [leaders] often trip themselves up with inconsistencies and new stories to cover the old inconsistencies.

The next section, "Define What's Over and What Isn't" has related information. "One of the most important leadership roles during times of change is that of putting into words what it is time to leave behind…[Leaders] risk three equally serious and difficult reactions when they do not specify what is over and what isn't:

1. People don't dare to stop doing anything; they try to do all the old things and the new things. Soon they burn out with the overload.
2. People make their own decisions about what to discard and what to keep, and the result is inconsistency and chaos.

3. People toss out everything that was done in the past, and the baby disappears with the bathwater. (pages 37-38)

Q: Think about the last time you initiated a major change. Looking back, what could you have done to communicate more clearly and more consistently? What will you do differently next time?

Q: As I wrote this discussion summary, I had to work through a situation where a ministry leader told "a half-truth" that came back to bite us. Think about a time when you made the same mistake in "an effort to protect someone." How could you have done a better job of balancing grace AND truth?

G. The next three sections are also somewhat related.
- "Mark the Endings:" Don't just talk about the endings—create actions or activities that dramatize them.

- "Treat the Past with Respect:" Present innovations as developments that build on the past and help to realize its potential. Honor the past for what it has accomplished.

- "Let People Take a Piece of the Old Way with Them:" Endings occur more easily if people can take a bit of the past with them. You are trying to disengage people from it, not stamp it out like an infection. And in particular, you don't want to make people feel blamed for having been part of it. (pages 38-41)

Action Item: I have heard of churches that in the process of replacing an historic sanctuary building have sold bricks from the old building as a fund raiser. What it also did is provide a memento of the old building for long term members. Think about a major change that you are attempting to implement. What are some things you could do to:
- mark the ending,
- treat the past with greater respect, and
- let people move forward with a piece of history

H. In the closing sections he reminds us that the past, which people are likely to idealize during an ending, was the product of change. When people start talking about 'the good old days,' it's easy to imagine that they are describing a peaceful time of stability. But that is selective memory. There were changes then too. Whenever something that is viewed as a break with the past turns out successfully, people forget the loss they felt when the change happened and begin to celebrate it as a 'tradition.'

He goes on to state, "Whatever must end, must end. Don't drag it out. Plan it carefully, and once it is done, allow time for healing." But he continues, "people have to let go of the present first. Leaders forget that while the first task of change management is to understand the desired outcome and how to get there, the first task of transition management is to convince people to leave home. You'll save yourself a lot of grief if you remember the distinction. (pages 41-42)

Q: How would YOU describe the two major areas involved in the implementation of a new idea (change and transition)?

Q: Has the author convinced you of the importance of understanding and managing the personal aspect of organizational change? Why or why not?

I. The chapter concludes with the following checklist:
   ☐ Have I studied the change carefully and identified who is likely to lose what—including what I myself am likely to lose?
   ☐ Do I understand the subjective realities of those losses to the people who experience them, even when they seem to me to be overreacting?
   ☐ Have I acknowledged these losses with sympathy?
   ☐ Have I permitted people to grieve and protected them from well-meant attempts to stop them from expressing their anger or sadness?
   ☐ Have I publicly expressed my own sense of loss, if I feel any?
   ☐ Have I found ways to compensate people for their losses?
   ☐ Am I giving people accurate information and doing it again and again using a variety of communications media?
   ☐ Have I defined clearly what is over and what isn't?
   ☐ Have I found ways to "mark the ending?"
   ☐ Am I being careful not to denigrate the past but, when possible, finding ways to honor it?
   ☐ Have I made a plan for giving people a piece of the past to take with them?
   ☐ Have I made it clear how the ending we are making is necessary to protect the continuity of the organization or conditions on which the organization depends?
   ☐ Is the ending we are making big enough to get the job done in one step?

   And the following process questions:
   • What actions can you take to help people deal more successfully with the endings that are taking place in your organization?
   • What can you do today to get started on this aspect of transition management? (pages 43-44)

Chapter Four: Leading People Through the Neutral Zone

A. If this phase lasted only a short time, you could just wait for it to pass. But when the change is deep and far-reaching, this time between the old identity and the new can stretch out for months, even years. As Andre Gide, French novelist, put it, "One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time."

   Neutral zones occur not only in organizations but also in individual lives and in the history of whole societies…The dangers represented by the neutral zone take several forms:
   1. People's anxiety rises and their motivation falls.
   2. People in the neutral zone miss more work than at other times.
   3. Old weaknesses, previously patched over or compensated for, reemerge in full flower.
   4. In the neutral zone, people are overloaded, they frequently get mixed signals, and systems are in flux and therefore are more than normally unreliable.

5. Given the ambiguities of the neutral zone, it is easy for people to become polarized: some want to rush forward and others want to go back to the old ways.
6. Disorganized and tired, people respond slowly and halfheartedly to competitive threats. If they are resentful and looking for ways to pay the organization back, they may even sabotage the organization's ability to respond to the outside attacks.

It's the management of the time in the neutral zone that prevents the organization from coming apart as it crosses the gap between the old way and the new. The authors provide the following graphic to help us visualize the reality that major change requires what exists to be torn apart and reconfigured in what he calls the neutral zone:

After pointing out that the neutral zone is a very difficult time, the authors provide some encouragement as they share that it can also be a creative time. The task before a leader becomes twofold: first, to get your people through the neutral zone in one piece; and second, to capitalize on all the confusion by encouraging them to be innovative. (pages 45-49)

Figure 4.1 Transition: A square morphs into a circle.

Q: Did you take note of the real possibility that "new changes" you implement can open very "old wounds" from the past? Have you ever heard someone say, "We tried that one, and it doesn't work?" As a leader, what can you do to minimize the impact of this reality?

Q: Did you also note that the "neutral zone" can provide opportunities for creative thinking? As you think about a major change you initiated with some degree of success, how could you have encouraged more creativity in the process?

B. In a section entitled "Redefine the Neutral Zone," Bridges provides an illustration of a company who announced a plant closing at a specific time in the future. The employees at the plant quickly began to use the metaphor of a sinking ship. The leadership helped them work through the neutral zone by redefining it as people taking the last voyage. With the new metaphor they talked about the ship "reaching port," everyone could 'disembark" in a planned fashion, and affirming those who "stayed on board" to make it to port. (pages 50-51)

Q: Take a few minutes and think about a major change you are currently trying to initiate. What kind of a metaphor or word picture could you use to create positive energy?

C. Pastors and ministry leaders will be able to relate to the analogy he uses in this section. "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…the outlook, attitudes, values, self-images, and ways of thinking that were functional in the past had to 'die' before they were ready for life in the new reality. Moses took care of transition's ending phase when he led his people out of Egypt, but it was the 40 years in the neutral zone wilderness that got Egypt out of his people. It won't take you 40 years, but you aren't going to be able to do it in a few weeks either."

Bridges then offers six things you can do to give structure and strength during a time when people are likely to feel lost and confused:
1. You can try hard to protect people from further changes while they're trying to regain their balance…People can deal with a lot of change if it is coherent and part of a larger whole. But unrelated and unexpected changes, even small ones, can be the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back.
2. Review policies and procedures to see that they are adequate to deal with the confusing fluidity of the neutral zone.
3. What new roles, reporting relationships, or configurations of the organization chart do you need to develop to get through this time in the wilderness?
4. Set short-range goals for people to aim toward and to establish checkpoints along the way. This helps to counter the feeling of being lost, of meaninglessness, and of self-doubt that are common in the neutral zone.
5. Don't set people up for failure by promising that you will deliver high levels of output while you are in the neutral zone.
6. Find out what ministry leaders need to learn to function successfully in the neutral zone and then provide special training in those areas.

One additional step worthy of its own section is to strengthen intra-group connections. The neutral zone is a lonely place. People feel isolated, especially if they don't understand what is happening to them. As I have already noted, old problems are likely to resurface and old resentments are likely to come back to life. For these reasons it is especially important to try to rebuild a sense of identification with the group and of connectedness with one another…In the neutral zone, be wary of any arrangement or activity that shows a preference for one group over others. During this middle phase of transition, people want to feel that 'we are all in this boat together.' (pages 49-54)

Processing Activity: Take time to review Bridges six actions that can help people bring structure and strength during a major transition in light of what is currently happening in your church or ministry.

Q: As a leader, who is helping you to process the changes that are happening? Do you have a mentor? Are you in a cluster group with other ministers who can help you process what's happening? Who is helping you and holding you accountable?

D. For very large churches the section on using a transition monitoring team on pages 54-56 and Appendix C would be helpful.

E. He then returns to the topic of using the neutral zone creatively. He points out that "with everything up in the air anyway, people are more willing than usual to try new things." A sidebar from personal observation: in church life, high levels of change can provide an "excuse" for members and even leaders who have previously been willing to "stick it out" to look for another church. This "should" cause pastors and ministry leaders to do all they can to become more effective change agents.

Bridges lists seven things that a leader can do to encourage creativity during this phase:

1. Establish by word and example that this is a time to step back and take stock, a time to question the 'usual,' and a time to come up with new and creative solutions to the organization's difficulties.
2. Provide opportunities for others to step back and take stock, both organizationally and individually.
3. Provide training in the techniques of discovery and innovation.
4. Encourage experimentation.
5. Embrace losses, setbacks, or disadvantages as entry points into new solutions.
6. Look for opportunities to brainstorm new answers to old problems.
7. Restrain the natural impulse in times of ambiguity and disorganization to push prematurely for certainty and closure.

Bridges asks two excellent questions:
Q: How can I make this interim between the old and the new not only a bearable time but a time during which the organization and everyone's place in it are enhanced?

Q: How can we come out of this waiting time better than we were before the transition started? (pages 56-58)

F. This chapter also closes with a check list:
☐ Have I done my best to normalize the neutral zone by explaining it as an uncomfortable time that (with careful attention) can be turned to everyone's advantage?
☐ Have I redefined the neutral zone by choosing a new and more affirmative metaphor with which to describe it?
☐ Have I reinforced that metaphor with training programs, policy changes, and financial rewards for people to keep doing their jobs during the neutral zone?
☐ Am I protecting people adequately from inessential further changes?
☐ If I can't protect them, am I clustering those changes meaningfully?
☐ Have I created the temporary policies and procedures that we need to get us through the neutral zone?
☐ Have I created the temporary roles, reporting relationships, and organizational groupings that we need to get us through the neutral zone?
☐ Have I set short-range goals and checkpoints?
☐ Have I set realistic output objectives?
☐ Have I found the special training programs we need to deal successfully with the neutral zone?

☐ Have I found ways to keep people feeling that they still belong to the organization and are valued by our part of it? And have I taken care that perks and other forms of 'privilege' are not undermining the solidarity of the group?

☐ For very large churches: Have I set up one or more Transition Monitoring Teams to keep realistic feedback flowing upward during the time in the neutral zone?

☐ Are my people willing to experiment and take risks in intelligently conceived ventures—or are we punishing all failures?

☐ Have I stepped back and taken stock of how things are being done in my part of the organization?

☐ Have I provided others with opportunities to do the same thing? Have I provided them with the resources—facilitators, survey instruments, and so on—that will help them do that?

☐ Have I seen to it that people build their skills in creative thinking and innovation?

☐ Have I encouraged experimentation and seen to it that people are not punished for failing in intelligent efforts that do not pan out?

☐ Have I worked to transform the losses of our organization into opportunities to try doing things a new way?

☐ Have I set an example by brainstorming many answers to old problems—the ones that people say we just have to live with? Am I encouraging others to do the same?

☐ Am I regularly checking to see that I am not pushing for certainty and closure when it would be more conducive to creativity to live a little longer with uncertainty and questions?

☐ Am I using my time in the neutral zone as an opportunity to replace bucket brigades with integrated systems throughout the organization? (pages 60-62)

Action Items: Utilize the checklist above as you work through major changes.

Bridges again closes the chapter with a couple of excellent processing questions:

Q: What actions can you take to help people deal more successfully with the neutral zone in which your [church or ministry] currently finds itself?

Q: What can you do today to get started on this aspect of transition management? (page 62)

Chapter Five: Launching a New Beginning

A. Beginnings are psychological phenomena. They are marked by a release of new energy in a new direction—they are the expression of a new identity. They are much more than the practical and situational "new circumstances" that we might call starts. On a situational level, things can be changed quickly; [however, a new] beginning will take place only after people have come through the wilderness and are ready to make the emotional commitment to do things the new way and see themselves as new people. Starts involve new situations. Beginnings involve new understandings, new values, new attitudes, and—most of all—new identities. A start can and should be carefully designed, like an object. A beginning can and should be nurtured, like a plant. Starts take place on a schedule as a result of decisions… Beginnings follow the timing of the mind and heart. (pages 65-66)

Q: As a leader, has the author's continued emphasis on the personal, psychological, and emotional impact that organizational change creates changed the way you will initiate change in the future? If yes, in what ways? If not…keep reading!

B. In a section entitled "Ambivalence Toward Beginnings," Bridges notes, "Beginnings are strange things. People want them to happen but fear them at the same time. After long and seemingly pointless wanderings through the neutral zone, most people are greatly relieved to arrive at whatever Promised Land they've been moving toward. Yet beginnings are also scary, for they require a new commitment. They require, in some sense, that people become the new kind of person that the new situation demands. There are a number of reasons people resist new beginnings:

1. Beginnings reactivate some of the old anxieties that were originally triggered by the ending.
2. The new way of doing things represents a gamble: there is always the possibility it won't work.
3. The prospect of a risky new beginning will probably resonate with the past.
4. For some people, new beginnings destroy what was a pleasant experience in the neutral zone. (pages 66-67)

Q: Think of a new beginning that has occurred in your life in the past few months. What kind of emotions did it generate?

Q: With that personal realization in mind, what are some of the emotions that a new beginning you are attempting to lead will create in others?

C. Bridges notes that "More beginnings abort because they were not preceded by well-managed endings and neutral zones than for any other reason." He then points to the Four P's that a leader can do to pave the way for better beginnings:

1. You can explain the basic **Purpose** behind the outcome you seek.
2. You can paint a **Picture** of how the outcome will look and feel.
3. You can lay out a step-by-step **Plan** for phasing in the outcome.
4. You can give each person a **Part** to play in both the plan and the outcome.

Much of the balance of the chapter elaborates on the Four P's. As it relates to Purpose, he points out three mistakes leaders make as it relates to purpose. Often people have trouble understanding the purpose because they do not have a realistic idea of where the organization really stands and what its problems are. In that case, you need to "sell the problems" before you try to sell a solution to those problems. If that wasn't done during the ending phase— when it should have been done—now is the time to provide answers to these questions:
1. What is the problem? What is the situation that requires this change to solve it?
2. Who says so, and on what evidence?
3. What would occur if no one acted to solve this problem?
4. And what would happen to us if that occurred? (pages 68-69)

Q: What major change are you attempting to initiate in your ministry? Take a few minutes and answer the four questions above. Have you clearly communicated the answers to these questions to your leadership team and to your church or ministry?

D. One of the terrible obstacles to many beginnings is that there is no discernible purpose behind the proposed changes. There are different reasons for an apparent lack of purpose, and each of them calls for a different action from you.
1. The purpose is not discernible because it has not yet been clearly explained in terms that mean something to you. The solution here is more clarity and more effective communications from the leadership team.
2. The purpose is not discernible because it has not been communicated at all. He suggests three reasons this happens.
    *   There may be no purpose, at least none that will stand up to open scrutiny.
    *   There *is* an idea, but the leadership isn't talking because they don't think that people need to understand…or that they don't need to understand now.
    *   There is a purpose—at least you strongly suspect there is—but the "official reason" is a smoke screen to cover what cannot publicly be said.

His closing comments in the section are, "Bear these things in mind:
1. The purpose must be real, not make-believe.
2. The purpose needs to grow out of the actual situation faced by the organization and the organization's nature and resources. (pages 70-71)

Q: Think about the last time a major change was "forced on you." As you reflect on the "mistakes" the leaders made, which of the above issues were in play? How can you avoid making the same mistake(s) as you lead change?

E. Purposes are critical to beginnings, but they are rather abstract. They are ideas, and most people are not ready to throw themselves into a difficult and risky undertaking simply on the basis of an idea…They need a picture of how the outcome will look, and they need to be able to imagine how it will feel to be a participant in it.

He reached into our world, the Bible, to pull out a beautiful example. He points out that Moses, who as we know was not a great communicator, used a powerful picture in describing the Promised Land as a Land Flowing with Milk and Honey.

Two things to watch out for:
*   *First, don't expect the picture to have its effect prematurely.* In this section he provides, in my opinion, one of the more important concepts a leader must grasp about transitions. Leaders typically go through their transitions before they launch the changes. By the time they are ready to announce the change, they have long since put their endings and their neutral zone behind them, and now they're ready for a new beginning. But they forget that their staff and members will just be entering the neutral zone at the point the change is announced.
*   *The second warning is not to overwhelm people with a picture that is so hard for them to identify with that they become intimidated rather than excited.* (pages 72-75)

Q: Stop and ponder the reality that as you lead change, you will be significantly ahead of those you lead in processing the new idea. With this reality in mind, how can you use a picture to help others process the change more quickly?

Activity: The next time you initiate a major change, you might take time to journal your thoughts and the feedback you receive as you go through the transition process. This discipline could significantly assist you as you implement the current change, but also inform you in future change initiatives.

F. In the *Create a Plan* segment, Bridges notes that many leaders respond to the picture and assume everyone else will as well. However, for those who are operationally minded, the picture can be interesting, but their question is, "What do we do now—and be specific?"

He points out that a transition management plan differs from a change management plan in three specific ways:
- First, it is much more detailed, addressing the change on the personal rather than the collective level.
- Second, it is oriented to the process and not just the outcome.
- A third difference is less evident in the final product but important in its creation. A change management plan starts with the outcome and then works backward, step by step, to create the necessary preconditions for the outcome. A transition management plan starts with where people are and works forward, step by step, through the process of leaving the past behind, getting through the wilderness and profiting from it, and emerging with new attitudes, behaviors, and identity. (pages 75-76)

Q: Have you ever stopped to create a Management Plan as you implemented a major change? Don't feel bad, most of us have never done it either.

Action Item: The next time you are going to implement major change, take time to work with your leadership team, and work through the three steps above to create a Management Plan.

G. The final step is making sure people have a *Part to Play*. Here he mentions two specific parts people can play:
- First, they need to see the role and their relationship to others in the new scheme of things.
- You also need to give people a role in dealing effectively with the transition process itself.

A good Biblical example of this not mentioned in the book is Nehemiah. When he led the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem, he made sure everyone had a part to play.

He closes this section by sharing five ways giving people a role facilitates the new beginning.
- It gives people new insight into the real problems being faced by the organization.

- It can help the leader get people aligned with them as they focus together on solving the problems. This can help create allies rather than adversaries.
- Giving people a part brings their firsthand knowledge to bear on solving the problems.
- The knowledge thus provided is more than the facts about the problem—it also includes the facts about the self-interest of the various parties affected by the situation.
- Everyone who plays a part is, tacitly at least, implicated in the outcome. (pages 76-78)

Q: What part did you play in the last major change that was "forced upon you?"

Q: If the answer was none, how could the leader have engaged you in the process?

Q: On the major change you are initiating, how can you help engage others in the process—what part can they play?

H. The final segment of the chapter is *Reinforcing the New Beginning*. In it he provides four specific rules:
1. *Be Consistent*—Consistent in your messaging through policies, procedures, and priorities that do not conflict with or contradict the desired changes. Consistent in your actions as a leader—are you walking the talk. And, consistent in rewarding the "right kind of actions." In other words, don't tell people to act and react in a new way, while you reward them for acting and reacting in the old ways.
2. *Ensure Quick Success*—your plan should include some early (even if they are small) opportunities for success. Quick successes reassure the believers, convince the doubters, and confound the critics.
3. *Symbolize the New Identity*—People are not merely logical beings; they are full of feeling too. That is why what might seem to be small issues to you can take on enormous importance as individuals and their organization. During highly charged times of transition, everything can take on a symbolic hue—everything means something to someone.
4. *Celebrate the Success*—When you feel that the majority of your people are emerging from the wilderness and that a new purpose, a new system, and a new sense of identity have been established, you'll do well to take time to celebrate that the transition is over. (pages 78-82)
.

Q: Which of the above will be the easiest for you to implement? Why?

Q: Which of the above will be hardest for you to implement? Why?

Chapter Six: Transition, Development, and Renewal

A. The chapter opens with a quote from Ichak Adizes: *People, products, markets, even societies, have life-cycles—birth, growth, maturity, old age, and death. At every life-cycle passage a typical pattern of behavior emerges.* He goes on to point out that the difficulty that an

organization has launching a new beginning may come less from the new situation that has to be managed than from the fact that the new beginning represents a whole new life stage for the organization and a new and unfamiliar identity. (page 87)

Let me inject a personal observation at this point. Organizations can experience multiple life cycles. In fact I have had the privilege of being a member of three different churches that experienced a major revitalization and the beginning a new lifecycle. On the other hand, we as human beings will experience only one lifecycle here on earth—yes it will have plenty of ups and downs. But, on the other hand, we were created for eternity by God, while the organizations we create here on earth (including churches and ministries) will not exist in eternity. <u>Bottom line</u>: people and relationships will survive into eternity while the organizations we serve here on earth will not. This reality tells me that helping people deal with transitions might be just as important—and at times more so—than the changes we are trying to implement to make our church/ministry healthier.

Q: Have you paused to consider the personal and cultural aspect of lifecycle and transitioning?

Q: As you look at the churches where you have served in the past, describe where each church is today as it relates to the lifecycle.

Q: Where would you say your current church is as it relates to the lifecycle?

B. If you have never studied The Seven Stages of Organizational Life, I think you will find this chapter very illuminating. Even if you have been an avid student of the concept this chapter will bring some fresh insights or at least serve as an excellent reminder that churches are organizations, and your church sits firmly at a specific point along the lifecycle. The critical question is where?

1. *Dreaming the Dream*— when the organization is little more than an idea in the mind of the founder.
2. *Launching the Venture*— the time of organizational infancy and childhood. There are no formal systems yet; no hiring policies or pay scales, no fixed way of doing things.
3. *Getting Organized*—this is the time when roles start to become more specialized and more formally defined.
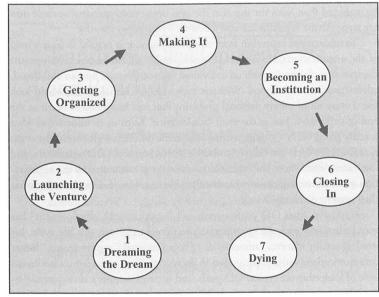4. *Making It*—the organization's adulthood begins.

Figure 6.1   The organizational life cycle.

5. *Becoming an Institution*—the organizational imperative shifts from that of taking and staking out territory to occupying it. Like the "Making It" phase, this phase can last a very long time. And during most of that time there is little talk about further development.
6. *Closing In*—If the organization is a governmental body that doesn't need to achieve success in the marketplace, the result is likely to be an increasingly unresponsive bureaucracy. If its market is competitive [and that includes the church], the result is difficult to sustain.
7. *Dying*—Unlike individuals, for whom dying is an event that can be pinned to a specific situation and date, organizations tend to come to the end of their lives in ways that make the fact of death less obvious.

He then points out that transitions are the dynamic interludes between one of the seven stages of organizational life and the next. A single transition may not be enough to bring about the complete transformation of the organization and the reorientation of its people; there may instead be a string of transitions, each of which carries the organization a step further along the path of its development. These multi-transition turnings can take years to finish. The organizational world is full of leaders with big dreams, but to convert Dreams into Ventures, leaders have to go through a transition; many of them are not ready to do that. (pages 88-94)

Q: Have you been exposed to the lifecycle concept previously? How do Bridges' descriptions compare with your previous understanding?

Q: Did you pick up his statement that "a transition" must take place before the church can move from one phase to another? That also means that changes have to take place for a church to move up the lifecycle in a healthy and productive manner.

Action Item: Stop and think about the multiple transitions that are recorded in the book of Acts as the early church was transformed from a sect of Judaism to the body of Christ open to every ethnic group in the world (Acts 1:8). What were some of the "speed bumps" that they encountered? (Note specifically Acts 6 where the early church was overlooking ministry to Greek widows and Acts 15 where the church had to answer the question, "Do I have to become an observant Jew to become a Christian?")

C. He then lists Five Laws of Organizational Development:
   1. *Those who were most at home with the necessary activities and arrangements of one phase are the ones who are the most likely to experience the subsequent phase as a severe personal setback.* He points out that the kind of people who cluster around such founders tend to admire and idealize them, and their loyalty is personal.
   2. *The successful outcome of any phase of organizational development triggers its demise by creating challenges that it is not equipped to handle.* The sequence of Dream-to-Venture-to-Getting Organized is the growth pattern coded into the very DNA of organizational life, but an understanding of the transitions that the sequence requires is not. Most of what made the original core group of employees valuable to the Venture makes them detrimental to the process of Getting Organized. The founder may be one of those assets-turned-liability.

3. *In any significant transition, the thing that the organization needs to let go of is the very thing that got it this far.* Unfortunately that includes people who are not able to adapt.
4. *Whenever there is a painful, troubled time in the organization, a developmental transition is probably going on.* If such troubles are very disruptive, you may try to avoid making the transition. Yet if you do that, you will run into the Fifth Law.
5. *During the first half of the life cycle, organizations become concerned with their stability through the Making It Stage.* Not to make a transition when the time is ripe for one to occur will cause a developmental "retardation" in the organization. Numerical growth may continue for a time, but the conditions for further development will have been aborted by your avoidance of the transition, and in the end the retardation will threaten the very existence of the organization.

But after an organization has passed the half-way point, things change: Form becomes more important than function; Communication ceases to be a way to get through to others and begins to become a way to demonstrate an acceptable style and manner—we communicate through channels rather than to those who need to know; and more effort is spent on getting everyone on board than on implementing anything new and different.

Typically, the crises that bring institutionality to an end and initiate the transition to "Closing In" are external threats or financial stability brought on by the behaviors that are the downside of institutionality. So it is important to remember that the most telling signs of being "Closed In" are not just that routine squeezes out creativity and even efficiency—though these are actual outcomes. The real hallmark of "Closing In" is that the organization seals itself off from effective communication with its environment and becomes preoccupied with its own inner workings to the point where operations are ritualized into secret and magical acts. (pages 94-98)

Q: As you review the "Laws of Organizational Development" which of the five did you "amen" the loudest? Why?

Q: As you review the "Laws of Organizational Development" which of the five did you "Oh man" the loudest? Why?

Q: This short section is filled with nuggets worth mining. Re-read the section with an eye to answering the question, What is God telling me today that I need to take to heart if I am going to be an effective leader?

D. If the chapter ended there, most of us would be discouraged. But it doesn't! Remember, one significant difference between us and an organization is that an organization has the opportunity to experience renewal/rebirth in this world (multiple life cycles).

Bridges notes in a section entitled "Organizational Renewal" that, "renewal comes about not by changing specific practices or cultural values but by taking the organization back to the start of its life cycle." He continues, "Leaders who would go down this path must have a clear understanding of what they are doing and the resources to carry it off."

As the figure on the right suggests, renewal always involves finding ways to recapture and reincorporate the energy of the first three phases of the organizational life cycle.

He then points to three specific renewal steps:

Figure 6.2 Organizational Renewl

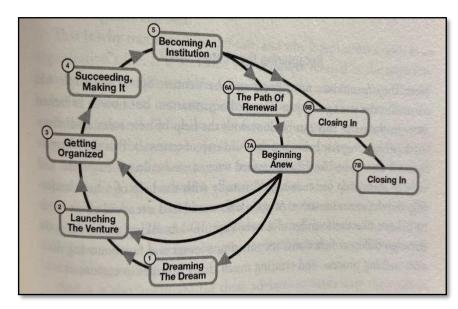1. *Redreaming the Dream*— with businesses this often means getting a new central idea around which to build the organization. With churches it means getting back to the real purpose for which God created the church—to make disciples of all nations for the glory of God (Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8).
2. *Recapturing the Venture Spirit*—anyone who would lead a renewal effort needs to behave like the founder of a new Venture. In church life, revitalization pastors share many of the same gifts as a church planter.
3. *Getting Reorganized*—this time you are approaching Getting Organized from the other side, as it were you are, *recovering* the elements of a successful organization rather than *developing* them from scratch.

People who have grown used to the practices and culture of an institutional church will have to let go of expectations and assumptions that have been rewarded for some time. These people are not flakes and slackers. Until things took an unexpected turn, they were the organization's brightest and best. It is important for leaders to comprehend the implications of what they are trying to achieve and not to let their understanding that renewal is absolutely essential for survival to blind them to the painful transitions that will be necessary to make things turnout as intended. (pages 99-101)

Q: How do you feel about the reality that any church can experience revitalization?

Q: As you reflect on what you know about church planting (starting at step one) and church revitalization (starting at step seven) what would be some of the similarities and differences in giftedness that would be needed in each context?

E. The first four stages represent "growth" in the positive meaning of that term. An organization that tries to skip one of them is headed for trouble, as is an organization that refuses to move on from one stage into the next one. But the fifth stage—Becoming an Institution—is different. It feels like a step forward to most people, but in time the downside of the institutional phase begins to cause more serious problems. It is then that farsighted leaders,

23

with an instinctive sense of where things are headed, start to think about what it would take to revitalize the organization. These leaders should start by asking themselves these three transition-based questions:

1. *What is it time for us to let go of?* It is easier to identify what it's time for *others* to let go of; it's always harder to discern what it is time for *you* to let go of. Wise leaders ask themselves, "What part of my identity—of the way I come across, and even the way I experience myself—do I need to let go of if we are going to enter the Path of Renewal?"
2. *How will we spend our time in the neutral zone?* It's fine to get started with changes right away, but from the start you need to think of this as a long, complex process you are tackling.
3. *What is this new beginning going to require of us and of others in the organization?* In your communications you need to speak to wherever people are NOW, not to where you want them to go, and they need your help, not in getting to the destination you want them ultimately to reach, but in taking the NEXT BEST STEP in the transition they find themselves in because of your big change. What kind of reinforcements will really help people develop the new attitudes and behaviors that will be necessary if the beginning is to work? (pages 102-104)

Action Item: Take time answer each of the three questions he poses in this section.

F. He closes the chapter with a very thought provoking statement: "Executive teams we have worked with can often, in hindsight, lay out a clear chronology of the stages of their organization's development and the events that triggered the transition from one stage to the next. But in the moment these same people found it very difficult to describe exactly what was happening." The old proverbial phrase is true: we usually can't see the forest for the trees. (page 104-105)

Because of this reality, when our association went through a five-year strategic planning process, we brought in an "outsider" to help us. We had individuals in our churches very capable of leading the process; however, my fear was that we would miss some critical pieces because we were too close and had too much invested in the way things are today.
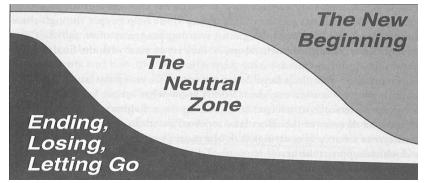
Q: When is the last time your church invited an outside objective observer to help you evaluate where you are? Or, when was the last time you used one of the several quality church health tools that are currently available to identify your church's strengths and challenges?

Q: If you have never done that, I would simply ask Why not? Do you know where to find the tools?

**PART THREE: DEALING WITH NONSTOP CHANGE
IN THE ORGANIZATION AND IN YOUR LIFE**

Chapter Seven: How to Deal with Nonstop Change

A. He opens the chapter with the statement, "It has become a truism that the only constant today is change. (Ironically, the Greek philosopher Heracleitus said the very same thing—2,500 years ago!" Bridges then states, "What I've been saying about transition may seem artificial…I've been drawing an ideal picture. The clarity of this ideal image of transition; however, is useful. Ironically one of the reasons organizations have paid so little attention to transition is that they're overwhelmed by it. Transition is all around them—so close that they can't see it clearly.

Remember this visual showing the three phases of transition from chapter one? If you reacted as I did to the visual, you had an "aha" moment as you thought, "That's why change is so messy. What the author is now telling us

is that it's really not that neat and clean. We are usually living in the midst of multiple transitions dealing with multiple changes.

Then he adds the even more disconcerting reality that changes spin off from each other in a never-ending sequence—which means there are constant transition phases being initiated. However, he does leave us with some hope. First, in the form of a great analogy:

Your experience as a leader can be compared to that of an orchestra conductor. You have to keep track of the many different instruments, each playing different sequences of notes and each starting or stopping on its own terms. While you keep a sense of the whole piece, you have to shift your attention from one section to another. It is important for you to hold in your mind the overall design of the melody and harmonies, for unless you do that, every little change will sound like a new and unrelated melody that just happened to come along, without any relation to the rest of the music.

Then he encourages us to tie every change back to the underlying purpose of the organization. He phrases it this way, "In order to handle nonstop organizational change, you're going to *need an overall design within which the various and separate changes are integrated as component elements.*(pages 109-112)

   Q: If you were to describe how well you are leading change and transitions in your church to the competence level of a conductor, would you be capable of leading a grade school, middle school, high school, college, or professional orchestra?

B. Before launching into nine keys to surviving non-stop change, he points out two basic principles. First, he notes that the hardest thing to deal with is not the pace of change but changes in the acceleration of that pace. It is the acceleration of the pace of change in the past several decades that we are having trouble assimilating and that throws us into transition. Any change in the acceleration of change—even a deceleration—would do that; if change

somehow suddenly ceased today, people would have difficulty because the lack of change would itself be a change and would throw them into transition.

The second foundational principle he gives is, when you realize that you are in the midst of more changes than you can manage, simply postpone or cancel changes that are unrelated to the large shift you are trying to create. He points out that those incidental changes are seldom large enough to compensate for their disruptive effects. Then he admonishes those of us as leaders who have become personally "hooked" on change. Those of us who like the adrenalin rush of being immersed in a crisis situation, and in an environment where crises naturally abound some leaders become habituated to it. He closes the section with a strong admonishment: Change addicted leaders are dangerous people, although they may also be charismatic and can usually make a plausible-sounding case for whatever additional change they are proposing to make. (pages 112-113)

Action Item: His first principle can be a bit confusing. Using your own words, describe what he is saying to someone who has not read the book and see if they understand the concept.

Q: As it relates to the second principle, how often do you initiate change? How often do you take specific steps to respond to cultural or other changes for which you have no control? Based upon his comments, are you "hooked on change?" Or maybe just as bad, are you so adverse to change that you have gotten stuck in a rut? Remember the only difference between a rut and a grave is a rut is a grave with the ends knocked out.

C. For simplicity and space, I am going to discuss his Nine Keys to Managing Nonstop Change in groups of three.

First, *Foresee as Much as You Can*—He starts by cautioning us that there are two problems with forecasting. First, the relation between things is so immensely complex and the outcomes of that complexity are so unpredictable that it is almost impossible to know enough to say with any confidence what is going to happen. Second, forecast-based plans create a bandwagon effect that changes the conditions on which the forecasts themselves were based.

But he encourages us by stating that there are two kinds of forecasting that can help. Both are related to understanding life-cycle issues. First, he says we should do life-cycle forecasts on the organizational policies and structures that are currently in place. Second, he suggests life-cycle planning should be done for levels of employment, for areas of technical expertise, and for cultural understanding. He does throw in the reality that it is difficult to convince people who think that things that aren't broke "yet" might still need to be fixed, but you can certainly be ready with alternatives when the first cracks are discovered.

Second, *Do Worst-Case Scenarios*—Build into every plan a "what if?" clause. Take time and bring in the room out of the box thinkers and have them help you think through all the possibilities.

Third, *Make the Transition to "Change as the Norm"*—Only if continuous change is normalized as the new status quo can it be assimilated. People have to understand that the point of change is to preserve that which does not change. (pages 114-117)

Q: Does your giftedness include the ability to see multiple options and multiple outcomes? Not all of us are equally gifted in that area, so if that's not one of your strengths make sure you bring around you good leaders who can help you in this area. Even if you are strong in that area, it doesn't hurt to have others who can help.

Q: Did you catch his statement, "People have to understand that the point of change is to preserve that which does not change?" First, make sure this is true of the changes you initiate. Second, make sure you communicate to people how this change preserves the unchangeable.

D. The next three Keys to Managing Nonstop Change he mentions are:

Fourth, *Clarify Your Purpose*—Stability through change demands clarity about who you are and what you are trying to do. Times of continuous change put a premium on knowing clearly what you are trying to accomplish. Far too many organizational purpose statements are really descriptions of the organization's objectives. It is the purpose, not the objectives, that is the heartbeat of the organization. Sometimes an organization has to make changes in its objectives to preserve its purpose. One of the three examples he gives is of a company whose purpose is to produce the best possible containers. They switched from manufacturing glass bottles to plastic ones—not a minor change.

Fifth, *Rebuild Trust*—The good news is that you can build trust; the bad news is that it takes time to build it. Bridges points out that there are two sides to trust: the first is outward-looking and grows from a person's past experiences with that particular person or group; the second is inward-looking and comes from the person's own history. As a leader, you have control over the outward-facing source, so start there. He goes on to mention several actions a leader can take to build trust. If your church is struggling in this area, a good read would be Covey's book *The Speed of Trust*. [I've also done a discussion summary on it.]

Sixth, *Unload Old Baggage*—Leaders often find themselves fighting old battles when transition starts. These battles may even precede the leaders own tenure. Transition is like a low-pressure area on the organizational weather map. It attracts all the storms and conflicts in the area, past as well as present. This is because transition "decompresses" an organization. Many of the barriers that held things in check come down. Old grievances resurface. Old scars start to ache. Old skeletons come tumbling out of the closet. On the positive side, every transition is an opportunity to heal the old wounds that have been undermining effectiveness and productivity. It is never too late to become an organization that manages its people well. For that reason, the old scar and the unresolved issue are great gifts. They represent opportunities for organizational enhancement. (pages 117-122)

Q: Which of these three areas needs some attention right now in your leadership world? What are some specific things you can begin to do today to positively impact that area?

E. The next three Keys to Managing Nonstop Change he mentions are:

Seventh, *Sell Problems, Not Solutions*—People let go of outlived arrangements and bygone values more readily if they are convinced that there is a serious problem that demands a solution. Some of the ways selling problems contributes to your ability to manage nonstop change successfully are:
1. People who understand the organization's real problems are in the market for solutions.
2. If you understand the problem and the people you work with don't understand it, a polarity is immediately set up.
3. If everyone recognizes the problem, it is likely to be solved much faster.
4. Selling problems implicates everyone in the solution.

He closes this section with a point of emphasis. It is ironic that involving people is sometimes viewed as too time-consuming for a world of rapid change. Actually, it is the authoritarian style and the command mentality that goes with it that take too much time—time spent slugging it out in an attempt to overcome each pocket of self-interest, trying to motivate people who feel that the change was forced on them, arguing with people who don't even know that there are problems. Selling problems is, in fact, the investment that pays long-term dividends by getting people more prepared for organizational transitions—and for a world of continuous change in general.

Eighth, *Challenge and Response*—We are constantly hearing about competitiveness, game plans, and winning. It is not by beating our competition but by capitalizing on the rapid pace of change that today's organizations will thrive. He mentions a couple of keys to capitalizing on change. One lies in understanding and utilizing "the cycle of challenge and response." Great organizations rise to power not because of their advantages, but because they treated their disadvantages as challenges to which they discovered creative responses. Focusing on competition blinds you to the real challenge, which is capitalizing on change.

Another advantage to the challenge and response approach to dealing with change is it can be used at any level of the organization. A senior pastor can model it as he faces challenges and comes up with responses. He can encourage his staff to do the same. This process can break the stranglehold of passivity that develops when staff and members see their jobs as merely carrying out the orders of those above them. New challenges can then call for creative responses rather than compliance. Challenge and response can restore a sense of control and purpose to people.

Ninth, *Increasing the Organization's Transition-Worthiness*—He opens the section with an excellent team building exercise. We've all done some version of this, but it is how he uses the activity as an analogy for transitioning that makes it powerful. It is best suited for a larger group and an environment with a more permanent seating arrangement. He begins by asking people to rearrange themselves by birthday and then he further divides their birthday group into smaller working groups.

He then asks the working groups to reflect back on how individually and as a group they moved through transition—letting go of their old locations, milling around in a chaotic neutral zone, and finding a new location for themselves.

He then has them process how the room arrangement impacted the process. What if there were heavy tables, immovable chairs, narrow aisles, an even larger group, etc. This exercise can open the doors to asking people what current conditions and organizational arrangements are helping and which are hindering their ability to let go of the old, live with a confusing time in the neutral zone, and make a solid new beginning. If you've built an environment of trust, they will tell you. And if you listen and do whatever you can to make the organization more transition-worthy, it'll pay off. (pages 122-126)

Q: Think about a major change that was "thrust upon you." Review the four points he makes under the *Sell the Problem, Not the Solution* section and identify what could have been done better to make your transition less painful?

Q: Are you familiar with the process he calls Challenge and Response? How could you use it to create a better environment for dealing with change?

Action Item: Next time you are initiating a major change, try the activity he describes under the *Increasing the Organization's transition-Worthiness* section.

PART FOUR: THE CONCLUSION

Chapter Eight: A Practice Case

This is basically a repeat of Chapter Two with a new test case. If you have the book, I would again encourage you to take time to work through it. My guess is you will find, as I did, that this time with the benefit of the wisdom in the chapters in between, you will do much better.

Q: If you have the book and worked through the exercise, how well did your responses align with the author's? Did you do better this time?

Processing Activity: Go back to the activity suggested in chapter two. With the insights you now have add to and edit the list of things you could do to help yourself and your team to manage the transition you identified. Now review the response levels you had on the initial list and change them as needed. Also indicate what level of response you should take on your newly added items. Remember 1 is do it now while 5 is NOT at this time.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

The chapter begins with a German proverb—A great war leaves a country with three armies: an army of cripples, an army of mourners, and an army of thieves. Bridges uses the proverb to make some very challenging statements about organizational change. And because we lead a religious organization that is striving to give glory to God, we should pay even closer attention to what he is saying. Whatever positive results are gained through the changes we lead, we can leave behind

three serious problems: the survivors who have been wounded by the changes they have been through; those who are grieving over all that they have lost in the change; and those whose loyalty and ethics have been so compromised by their experience that they turn hostile, self-centered, and subversive. To make matters worse, in the struggles surrounding organizational change, these "three armies" are found on the winning side as well as on the losing side.

The problem of survivors is seldom on the minds of the planners of change, but it cannot be avoided by anyone who must implement the change or by the people who must manage the situation that results from it.

This is why transition management is such a critical skill for you to develop. You're going to find yourself dealing with the aftermath of mismanaged or unmanaged transition every time you turn around. That aftermath is a leader's nightmare. Bridges writes, "To remind myself of its characteristics, I use the acronym GRASS:"

Guilt: As leaders we feel guilty that the changes we initiate cause people to get hurt. Guilt lowers self-esteem and can lead to overcompensation in either a permissiveness to make up for the earlier harsh acts, or an even harsher "blaming the victim" mentality.

Resentment: Everyone feels angry at the organization for the pain that transition causes. When yesterday's changes leave such a legacy of resentment, today's changes are undermined even before they are launched. In addition, resentment leads to sabotage and the subtler forms of pay-back that organizations experience today.

Anxiety: A small amount of anxiety can be a motivator; however, in larger doses it reduces energy, lowers motivation, and makes people unwilling to take the risk of trying something new.

Self-absorption: Anxious people become preoccupied with their own situations and lose their concern for the church, fellow church members, and for the lost.

Stress: I've already talked about the increase in the rate of illness and accidents when people are in transition. Good leaders learn to counter the sources of stress. Creating stress and then trying to "manage" it is like trying to cool your overheated brakes. The only real answer is to stop overheating them.

These are the five real and measurable costs of not managing transition effectively. The next time you think (or people tell you) that there isn't time to worry about the reactions of your staff or members to the latest plan for change, remember (or tell them) that not managing transition well is really a short-cut that costs much more than it saves. It leaves behind an exhausted and demoralized army.

Whatever currently exists is going to change. What it will look like is something that the futurists can debate. The only certainty is that between *here* and *there* will be a lot of change. Where there's change, there's transition. That's the utterly predictable equation:

<p style="text-align:center">change + human beings = transition</p>

There's no way to avoid it. But you can manage it. And if you want to come through it in one piece, you *must* manage it well. (pages 151-154)

Q: Think of the last major change you experienced. Can you identify people who fall into each of these categories: an army of cripples, an army of mourners, and an army of thieves? If the change was one you experienced vs one you initiated, in which of the three categories would you best fit?

Q: As I wrapped up this discussion summary, I was involved in a poorly managed transition in which all of the elements of GRASS were experienced. Stop and contemplate the change or changes you are trying to initiate as a leader and then reflect on Bridges GRASS acronym. What can and should you do to minimize these effects?

APPENDICES

The book includes five excellent appendices. If the summary above hasn't convinced you that the book is worth buying, his appendices should push you over the edge. Here is a short summary of each.

Appendix A: Assessing Your Transition Readiness

With the statement that he would be worried about the readiness of an organization that generated fewer than ten yeses, he lists fifteen questions a leader should ask before making major changes. Here is a sampling of his questions:

1. Is there a fairly widespread sense that the change is necessary? Is the change solving a real problem, or do people think that it is happening for some other reason.
2. Do most people accept that whatever change is taking place represents a valid and effective response to the underlying problem?
3. Has the proposed change polarized the membership in any way that is going to make the transition more disruptive than it would otherwise have been?
4. Is the level of trust in the church's leadership adequate? (pages 159-161)

Appendix B: Planning for Transition

He states, "You wouldn't launch a big happen, there are nonetheless some actions you ought to take to make sure it goes as well as it can." He then lists ten. Here are a couple of them:

- Collect information about the problem from those closest to it.
- Educate the leaders about the nature of transition and how it differs from change.
- Plan how you are going to explain, encourage, and reward the new behavior and attitudes that the changes are going to require of people. (pages 163-165)

Appendix C: Setting up a Transition Monitoring Team

<p style="text-align:center">31</p>

In Chapter 4 he talks about establishing a Transition Monitoring Team. In this appendix, he gives more detailed information about why and how to do it.(pages 167-172)

Appendix D: Career Advice for Employees of Organizations in Transition

Here he provides what he calls "The Five Job Shift Steps" that will help any individual who works in the midst of constant change. In summary form they are:

1. Find out what "resources" you bring to anyone who needs help.
2. Understand "the customer"—who you are going to serve.
3. Match your abilities (step 1) with unmet needs (step 2).
4. See yourself as "selling a product" (yourself) rather than "doing a job."
5. Stop thinking about your career and start thinking about a strategic plan for "your business." (pages 173-176)

Appendix E: The Leader's Role in Times of Transition

He frames this final section as a play with five acts. They are:

Act 1: Before the Transition—Sell the problem, develop a "one-minute speech" about the change and why it is needed, and have a realistic understanding of the trust level in the organization.

Act 2: During the Ending—Cut people some slack while they mourn their losses. Realize that you communicate more by actions than you do by words.

Act 3: In the Neutral Zone—Remember, the acronym CUSP: people need Control, Understanding, Support, and a clear sense of Priorities.

Act 4: During the New Beginning—As a leader you need to remember you are always farther into the new beginning than anyone else. Also, beginnings go better when there is enough flex in the system that people can customize situations to fit them.

Act 5: After the Transition—here he talks about enhancing an organization's transition-ability.

The book's closing statements bring us back to the biblical illustration of Moses. He wrote, "That Moses did not enter the Promised Land symbolizes the fact that the style of leadership has to change as a new beginning is being launched. The transformation of the people is finished at that point, and a more 'transactional' sort of leader is needed. That was Joshua, a much more conventional figure than Moses. The same leader can perform both functions, but it is still true that the heavy lifting of transition is done in the endings and the neutral zone and that a shift occurs as the new beginning takes place." (pages 177-182)

Q: As you review the five appendices, which one is the most pressing in your current leadership situation? Why?

Q: What is your next best step as it relates to change and transition?

Q: As you digest the overall impact of Bridges' book, What has changed most, your desire to grow a healthy church/ministry/organization or your willingness to invest more strategically in relationships? Why?