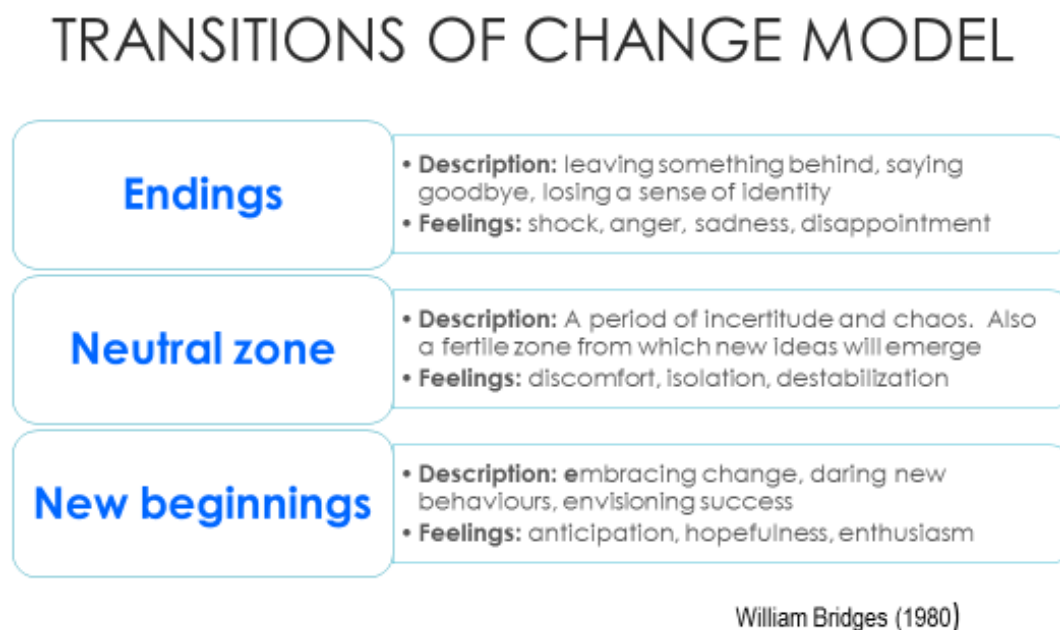


Coaching with the Transitions of Change Model

INTRODUCTION

The transitions of change is an excellent model by William Bridges (1980) who argues that change is an external event, whereas a transition is the psychological adjustment that the individual needs to make internally to adapt to the change. According to this model, change can be seen as having three phases:



In real life the stages may not be so clear cut, it is not a linear process and people may experience some going back and forth between the various stages, nonetheless the model provides an explanatory map for anyone who is experiencing the discomfort of going through a change process. The reference of the book is "Transitions, making sense of life changes" by William Bridges (1980). It's very readable, full of excellent insights, I highly recommend it.

COACHING APPROACH WITH THE TRANSITIONS OF CHANGE

I designed a coaching approach based on Bridges's model because I realized how beneficial it is for coaching clients who are feeling stress and confusion during a change process, to become aware of each phase described in this model. There are at least 5 main benefits that I have seen in my clients (there are many other benefits described in Bridge's book):

1. By understanding the model and its three stages, the client **can make sense of** what they are experiencing. It provides a clear and valid explanation.
2. They **can give a name** to what they are going through at each stage, verbalize the difficult emotions that they are feeling (fear, anger, worry, sadness, etc.), and recognize the positive emotions that emerge from the process.
3. This awareness **normalizes** the emotional state they are experiencing. The client realizes that it is perfectly normal to go through different phases of change, and to feel distressed at some points.

4. The person **can identify at what stage she is in** the change process, and can envision the end of it. Hope is aroused. The person can see the end of the tunnel.
5. With this new awareness the client can **better accept her current situation** and at the same time **make plans to move** herself on through the process. It helps her get unstuck and become proactive.

This model can be used to support your coaching client, wherever they are in the process, to

- Find a way of turning the page, honoring and saying goodbye to the past
- Handle the middle stage of uncertainty better, walk through it with resilience
- Prepare for a new start with energy and a strong vision

INSTRUCTIONS

Part A

When to use it

Use when you see that a client is having difficulty in dealing with a change (even one that occurred in the distant past), when they feel stuck and are unable to move forward in their current project. They might be nostalgic, regretting the past (a former job, boss, house, country), or paralyzed by uncertainty and unable to decide what to do.

1. Ask permission to present the model “May I show you a model that might be helpful to you in this situation of change?”
2. Show the model visually on the flipchart or on a handout, and explain it briefly.

Note: Your client might be aware of other famous change models, e.g. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1969); Kurt Lewin (1947); James O. Prochaska (1979); Virginia Satir (1991), so do your homework and know just a little bit about the main ones - so that you are prepared in case she wants to make comparisons. You'll find plenty of information on the web, without necessarily having to buy the books.

Part B

Once the model is understood by the client, start asking open questions that will make full use of the model. You can go through the three stages, or you can focus on the one that the coachee is most concerned with now.

General Questions

- What does this model tell you?
- In what stage do you see yourself at present?
- What else do you see?

Questions for Stage 1 - Endings

- What are you leaving behind? (Take time to acknowledge the coachee if there is sadness or regret)
- What do you want to say goodbye to?
- What do you want to keep? How is this important?
- How can you keep it, or at least some of it?
- What do you want to take along with you that could be useful today?
- What do you want to let go of?
- What would help you to turn the page?
- How can you say goodbye?
- What will you always remember?

Questions for stage 2 – The Neutral Zone

- What are you going through in this stage?
- How does it feel to not know?
- When in your life have already been through a time of uncertainty? How did you manage it?
- How have you grown since then?
- What are your strengths today?
- What other internal resources do you need today?
- What external resources do you need today?
- Where can you find help or encouragement?
- What is a symbol or an image that can help you through this period?
- What could grow out of this?
- What new opportunities could emerge from this?

Questions for stage 3 – New Beginnings

- How do you see the future?
- What solutions can you imagine?
- What new opportunities are emerging?
- What are your options now?
- What do you want to try out?
- What will you do?
- How will you do it?
- What support will you find?
- When are you going to start ?
- What is the next step after that ?

Note : A very important aspect of Bridge's model is to ritualize the passages from one stage to another, so that each transition is recognized and honored. As coaches we have plenty of ways to help our client enact a small transition ceremony by : a gesture, a drawing, spatial movements, creating a symbol, etc.

At the end of the session make you sure you ask your client « ***What have you learned today ?*** » You (and they) will be pleasantly surprised !