

Book Review: Managing Transitions

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## Book Review

### Summarize the main ideas the author is communicating

In Bridges' "Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change", the author's main argument is that it is not the changes that do you in, it's the transitions<sup>1</sup>. By transitions, we mean the 3-stage process that people encounter with the new situation resulting from the change. The three key points that support the author's main argument focus on the three phases of the transition process: (1) Letting go of the old ways, (2) The neutral zone, and (3) The new beginning.

Let us briefly explain each of the three phases of the transition process. First, there must be an ending or letting go of the old ways and the old identity people had. The author highlights in his discussion in his book that the ending must be realized and people must be helped with their losses<sup>1</sup>. For example, I can remember when I was attending a church in New Jersey and the church there had gone through a transition of losing their pastor that had been there for 27 years and getting a new pastor. We needed to help the congregation with their loss that they would not see the old pastor anymore and help them to recognize that he was leaving.

Secondly, the neutral zone is an "in between phase" where the old is gone but the new beginning is not fully operational. Bridges recommends using a transition monitoring team to evaluate how things are going for the people, to review plans or communications before they are announced, and to correct misinformation and counter rumors<sup>1</sup>. Because there was no transition monitoring team to monitor how things were going with the transition with the new pastor difficulties arose. These difficulties included: (1) There was a lack of visibility and transparency with the selection and installation of the new pastor, (2) Church Division and split happened, (3) Several key ministries ended as a result of transition with leadership, (4) There was no one to

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<sup>1</sup> Bridges, W. *Managing the Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. Da Capo Press, 2009.

contact if there was personal or family issues, (5) After 2 years, folks still have not embraced the new pastoral leader at the church, (6) No understanding of vision with the new leadership, and (7) There was a need for intercession/prayer for leadership. In short, a transition monitoring team could have helped to identify and address these issues.

Third, the new beginning involves coming out of the transition and making a new start. According to Bridges, with the new beginning, people develop a new identity, experience new energy and discover a new sense of purpose that makes change work<sup>1</sup>. As discussed, the new beginning of the church I attended in New Jersey never really took place because the vision was not developed and casted and there was no clear plan to make things happen.

### **What is one concept that stood out to you in this book?**

The one concept that stood out to me in this book is the need for a transition team during the neutral zone phase of a transition<sup>1</sup>. As discussed previously, because there was no transition team during the transition with the new pastor in the church in New Jersey, this resulted in numerous challenges. For one, the process for selection and installation of the new pastor was not clearly understood. Multiple candidates were interviewed by the Board of Elders and only 1 candidate was selected from multiple people. While the 1 candidate selected was presented to the congregation, there was no visibility and transparency with the other candidates that interviewed for the position. Secondly, there also seems to be a lack of unity with the congregation after the new pastor was installed. Why is this? With a multi-generation congregation, the needs of the next generation were not heard and being met. The children's and youth ministry was actually stopped over the last 2 years giving children and youth nowhere to turn with the COVID crisis taking place.

Also, the previous pastor had a heart and passion for the poor and the needy. With the

transition, it seemed as though the ministries that were in place to serve the poor and the needy had been dropped or ended. Not only were the needs of the poor and the needy not addressed in the community but also the needs of the poor and the marginalized within the church congregation were not addressed.

In addition, there is no clear vision of the future of the church with new leadership. Vision is needed to understand not only where the church is headed but also the plan to get there. Because of the lack of a transition team, the issues were not identified and addressed and contributed to the division in the church and the church split.

#### **What implications does this concept have for leading in a church context?**

1. Select a transition team to help with the transition of the new pastor in the church.
2. Develop and cast vision with a plan to understand where the church is going and the plan to make things happen.
3. Take a survey or poll to see what ministries the existing congregation is interested in and based on the result of the survey determine what ministries need to be added, what resources needed and funds needed to make the ministries happen.

#### **What needs to change in your life as a result?**

As a pastor, be open to casting vision dialectically to both the church leadership and congregation at the church. Value the feedback of the church leadership and congregation and include in the vision. Be willing to work as a team with church leadership and the congregation to develop and implement plans to make things happen.

**References:**

1. Bridges, W. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. Da Capo Press, 2009.