

SOME THOUGHTS
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I imagine you share my sentiment about the times in which we find ourselves now.....some apprehension, some impatience, some wonderings, much uncertainty. Last week, as I reflected on Governor Andrew Cuomo's press conference to his state's citizens (CNN allowed us to listen in), i wondered why HIS words and non-verbal messages were so comforting to me whereas the president's words had not. Then, I remembered William Bridges' work on change and transition.

So, let me share a few insights and advice from Dr. Bridges that apply to what leaders should do during the stages of emotional transition which accompany change.....in life, in our organizations, in our country. I studied with Dr. Bridges after my mentor recommended his book *TRANSITIONS: Making Sense of Life Changes*.

First, he distinguishes between change and transition:

Change is a shift in the external environment (like the coronavirus pandemic)

Transition is the psychological and emotional reorientation that accompanies that change (the internal response)

Second, he describes three stages of transition:

Endings - coming to an end, a sense of loss

Neutral Zone - a time of great disequilibrium, no longer the old way but not yet the new way, like the pause in mid-air when the trapeze artist reaches for the new trapeze

New Beginning - sometimes envisioned, sometimes unknown then developed along the way

Next, he says that leaders must do TWO things to support others during the Neutral Zone so they can get through it in a healthy manner: C & C:

Communication - Share any facts that we can.....say "I don't know if we don't know"....promise to share new information as soon as we can and then DO IT

Connection - Stay connected as much as possible in as many ways as possible.....folks need to know that leaders care about them

Therefore, do the opposite of what human nature is.....like hiding in a cave during the tough times!

Bridges reminds us that the stages of transition are a marathon, not a race. The leader just wants to make sure everyone gets to the New Beginning as best they can. He also taught us that the Neutral Zone, for as awful as it is, can be a time of great renewal and creative problem solving. Because.....when things are status quo, we tend to just live with the pebbles in our shoes which annoy us....but during the Neutral Zone, those same pebbles can seem like a mountain range....forcing us to tackle the issues that we would likely ignored before the change happened. That is the gift of the second stage of transition.

So, no wonder I am comforted by our own governor, Gretchen Whitmer, because she does the same. She is fast emerging as one of the top state leaders in her thoughtfulness, steadiness and follow-through as she works with her colleagues to inform and care for all of us who live in Michigan. Her caring ethic is strong and communicates that we are, indeed, all in this new reality together. I am proud to say I canvassed for her campaign!

Others yearn for communication and connection all of the time, but it is absolutely essential during the second stage of transition in times of change.

We all have a role to play in this challenging time, but leaders are so important right now. As Kouzes and Posner stated a decade ago, "Leadership matters.....and it matters more in uncertain times."

Thinking of each of you, especially our leaders across the city, county, state and country....and admiring your courage. Two helpful resources are:

- *TRANSITIONS: Making the Most of Life's Changes* by William Bridges & Susan Bridges, et al. 40y Anniversary Edition. 2019.
- *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of (Organizational) Change*, William Bridges & Susan Bridges, 25th Anniversary Edition. 2016.