



Transitions - John Campbell, chairman



Personal reaction to change follows a well-understood emotional curve of disbelief and resistance through token acceptance to full implementation. The curve makes sense and no doubt helps people appreciate what they are working through and why some parts of change feel so uncomfortable.

However, like all models, the personal change curve has its limitations. It portrays emotional variations as a smooth evolution (almost one wave) over a baseline equating to the period of change.

Those who have been through significant change (and most of us have) will recall that the journey is much more roller coaster than that.

Take, for example the transition phase – the bit between knowing what the change will be and implementing it. We experience rapid and huge swings between being really positive about the future and being depressed about the unknowns within it. These range from people you will miss, to systems, processes and supports that will not be there for you any more – let alone all the new stuff you will need to learn to thrive in your new environment.

In the opposite column are some thoughts on how to manage ourselves (and help others) through this period but first a picture that for me anchors the philosophy of focusing on our destination.



"Spotlight on our destination" – photograph of the West of Ireland by John Campbell in 2003

Transition plan:

Be absolutely crystal clear about the destination. One way to handle the roller coaster mood swings is to remain steadfast in your certainty of the new future. It is always more powerful to move towards a new future than away from an old past. This is because the further you get away from the past the less it affects you, the more you move towards your future the more powerful its pull becomes. So keep reminding yourself of the new future and what it will be about.

Let go. This follows naturally from the previous thought. Letting go of the past (even if it still feels like the present) is essential. This is standard stuff, but it is hard to do without reminding oneself of the imperative. The long lingering farewell never works – it always causes more hurt than it prevents and is a sure sign that you have not let go. Emotion, during transition, almost always encourages us to retain control over some of the things in our current existence till the last moment. This is unlikely to be an effective strategy for moving towards your future either for you or for those you hand over to. So let go with measured pace.

Fill your time with planning the future. The best way of supporting letting go is to invest time in the future; planning whatever it is to be about. It has two effects. The first is that it distracts from holding on to the present, and the second is that it builds excitement for the future. And even if you do not like planning it can be fun, because you are in the business of creating a vision for your future.

Celebrate each step as you take it. I remember coaching a senior civil servant not long ago who found that as his time to retire closed in on him, his boss began to suggest other people represented the department on matters where he used to take the lead. He found it hard until he reframed it into another signal that his new future was more appealing. Instead of fretting that he was beginning to be yesterday's person he began to celebrate another notch on the road to his new future. In this way he was both better able to help the new person without trying to retain control and also able to see his way clearer to get on with the things that were going to fulfil him in his new future.

For me the most value lies in attitude:

*Am I moving away from pain or towards gain?
One is flight, the other is a gemstone.*



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