ENDINGS, NEUTRAL PHASE, AND NEW BEGINNINGS

* Which Stage Are You In?

Katherine Hosie, Master Coach (Master of Science, Coaching Psychology)

The lovely Dawn Lillington recently asked me if I’d be interested in writing to you all each month. My response was a resounding Yes! There’s nothing more comforting to me than something Australian-related now that I’m no longer among the actual heat and dust of ‘home’…

My background is in evidence-based coaching, organizational change and human change, so my intention is to share with you information on theories and techniques that have been *proven* to work, in addition to what I hope you will find to be both beautiful and good.

To begin, one of the fundamental models that I’ve been thinking a lot (really, a lot!) about recently, is William Bridges’ *Model of Transition*. This is normally the first thing I look at when I start working with an organization or an individual, as knowing where we are now is essential to starting any good journey.

Bridges’ *Model of Transition* refers to three stages of change: *Endings*, the *Neutral Phase* (that nebulous space between the old and the new that I’m sure we’ve all felt at times), and *New Beginnings*. It’s often represented like this:

**BRIDGE’S MODEL OF TRANSITION**

*“Which phase are you in?”*

Ending New Beginnings

Neutral Phase

It’s quite self-explanatory, but in essence…

**Endings** are where we are when we are saying goodbye to things; a career, a relationship, a lifestyle, a role at work. These endings can be big or small, positive or negative. The assumption is that when something good happens to us then the endings don’t matter, for example when someone is promoted. We assume that we are in a “New Beginnings” stage of life and let’s just get on with it. However most people find it tricky to make a new start, e.g. in their new role, until they have dealt with the Endings and Neutral Phase first. This tying up of loose ends is essential before embarking on something new. To walk through a new door we must leave old things behind. As Endings are not as exciting as New Beginnings most people overlook them and pretend they don’t matter. This is a lost opportunity, as so much of our learning can come from examining our Endings and sifting for the lessons we have learned. Hint: we can only learn them if we look for them first. What can you learn from some of the Endings in your life?

**Neutral Phase:** this is the ‘thin place’ between Endings and New Beginnings; a time when we know that our old life, identity, norms are no longer valid, but we’re not quite sure what our new life, identity or norms look like either. The Neutral Phase is often a profoundly uncomfortable time for most people due to this uncertainty; there is often a premature grasping for something concrete and an impatience for clarity. However this can be a transformational time if we are patient, as this is when we weigh up the old and consider what’s important to us now. It is a time of shifting identity and potentially significant growth. Unfortunately it can feel as if we are just “stuck” or “lost”. I remember saying to a friend, whilst going through my first midlife crisis in my late 30’s, that the pain I’d created by trying to avoid my own uncertainty was worse than the pain of just feeling that uncertainty… :/

The Neutral Phase is often protracted and particularly intense around the late 30s / early 40s. If you can relate to this, don’t worry. It’s exactly where you are meant to be and I’ll recommend a book at the end of this article.

If you, or even your organization, are currently going through a Neutral Phase, then give yourself permission to be patient, reflective, honest with yourself, and see what emerges. Something will. It always does. And as I once heard, “It doesn’t matter how hard you push; it still take nine months to make a baby”.

**New Beginnings:** This is the fun part when we have tied up our Endings, have taken the baroque journey through the Neutral Phase, and we now know what we want and we’re ready to go out there and create it. When people are truly here they are ready to achieve a lot quickly. It’s like planting asparagus. Nothing happens for a long time, and then… suddenly!

The assumption, when people come to coaching, is that they are all meant to be at New Beginnings. Many of them aren’t, and that’s perfect, as coaching is not just about starting the new, bigger, better, shiny thing. It is also about knowing what to end, how to end it, and how to redefine what our future is going to be about now.

My hope is that by reading this you can clearly see where you are in certain areas of life, that this brings you some relief if that’s what you need, and that you will have a sense of what to do, or stop pushing too hard to do, now.

If you’re interested in further reading I highly recommend:

(For individuals) William Bridges, ‘*Transitions: Making Sense of Life’s Changes’*

[http://www.amazon.com/Transitions-Changes-Revised-Anniversary-Edition/dp/073820904X/ref=sr\_1\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1402697090&sr=8-1&keywords=william+bridges+transitions+making+sense+of+life’s+changes](http://www.amazon.com/Transitions-Changes-Revised-Anniversary-Edition/dp/073820904X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1402697090&sr=8-1&keywords=william+bridges+transitions+making+sense+of+life's+changes)

(For organizations) William Bridge, ‘*Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change’*

[http://www.amazon.com/Managing-Transitions-Making-Most-Change/dp/0738213802/ref=sr\_1\_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1402697196&sr=8-2&keywords=william+bridges+transitions+making+sense+of+life’s+changes](http://www.amazon.com/Managing-Transitions-Making-Most-Change/dp/0738213802/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1402697196&sr=8-2&keywords=william+bridges+transitions+making+sense+of+life's+changes)

(For those navigating mid-life) Peter A. O’Connor (a wise Australian), ‘Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis’

<http://www.amazon.com/Understanding-Mid-Life-Crisis-Peter-OConnor/dp/0809129760/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1402698327&sr=1-1&keywords=understanding+the+midlife+crisis>

Feel free to message me via LinkedIn on anything from organizational diagnosis and change, to leadership, right through to deciding on and making changes on a personal level.

Have a great month and enjoy this cool and gentle summer.

Kate

*Katherine E. Hosie is an Australian executive and private coach who relocated from Sydney to San Francisco in late 2013. She was previously President of the International Coach Federation Australasia, holds a Master of Science degree in Coaching Psychology, a Bachelor of Adult Education and Human Resource Development, and has over a decade of coaching executives and private clients. She is also trained in organizational diagnosis. You can find her at* [*https://www.linkedin.com/in/katherinehosie*](https://www.linkedin.com/in/katherinehosie)