

## It's Happening Again...Change!

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*"It's not that some people have willpower and some don't. It's that some people are ready for change and others are not." ...James Gordon, M. D.*

Are you ready? Do you have the skills, the ability to move forward and accept what is or will be? The world around us is changing rapidly. We've become a global society where what used to seem impossible is now everyday experience. Dentistry has always been and will always be a leader when it comes to change. As a dental professional will you be there to see and experience a new future?

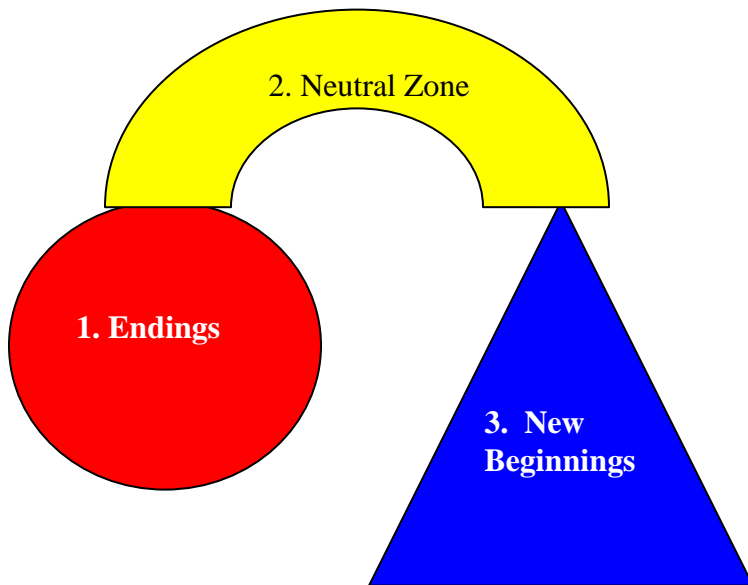
"Change is an event that is situational and external to us." The reasons for resisting change are many. Often we experience loss and or a feeling of hopelessness. Change whether planned or unexpected can upset our comfort zone and challenge our ability to make decisions. Some of us react by denying that change has an affect on our lives. Many become angry and put up emotional barriers to protect us from our loss. While others feel guilty that in some way if only we would have said something, done something, we could have prevented or sidelined the need for the change altogether. The reality is that to be alive is to experience constant and reoccurring change. It cannot be avoided. How you handle that change is what is most important.

"Transition, then, is the experience of the gradual, psychological reorientation process that happens inside of us as a response to change." When I had the pleasure of speaking to the ADAA members at their Annual Conference in Colorado, I used a model by William Bridges, PhD from his book *Making Sense*

of Life's Transitions that demonstrates a three part process of change. It goes like this...

The first stage in the change process is “Endings.” It is the letting go of the past and realizing that you must create endings in order to move to new beginnings. The second stage is called the “Neutral Zone.” This is the place or experience you enter when you are unsure of the future and of letting go of the past. It is an experience of limbo and uncertainty, but with new excitement about what lies ahead. The third stage is “New Beginnings.” Here you begin embracing the differences and positive aspects of change. You begin **anew**.

*Diagram of the Transition Process*



This model teaches us that transition doesn't just happen. One stage cannot be skipped or missed. To truly experience something new, each of us must move through a defined process. Likewise, as we are all different and unique we each experience this process within our own timeline based on our personal

previous experiences with change. To expect that everyone will be on the same page at the same time is not realistic. That is why when your dentist comes back from a conference or continuing education course and wants to buy new equipment and materials to change a routine treatment procedure...many of us respond "not again!"

William Bridges says there are *10 things* you can do to help make the change process easier:

**1. *Take your time in understanding what the change is about.***

Time is wonderful gift. We cannot rush our feelings. They are what they are and when you allow yourself the time to understand what the new change means in your life, you provide the grace necessary to help you move forward.

**2. *Arrange a temporary structure.***

When you experience the chaos, disorganization, and uncomfortable feelings associated with change, temporarily finding a way to manage or structure your current situation can bring back that lost sense of sanity.

**3. *Don't act for the sake of acting.***

Often times when challenged by new circumstances the first defense response is to "react." How many times have you found yourself wishing "if only I had thought the situation through and not reacted, the outcome could have been different."

**4. *Recognize ways you are comfortable.***

Find or decide on those things or experiences that you can take with you as you transition forward. Some things must end, but there are many aspects of who you are, what you are about, what you know, that bring comfort during challenging times.

**5. *Take care of yourself...physically, mentally/emotionally, socially.***

We have already determined that transition can be stressful. Recognizing that you cannot compromise your health, emotional well being, family, relationships, etc., is very important to your ability to handle the ups and downs of the change process.

**6. Explore the positive side of change.**

Macy's just bought Foley's. I asked one of the managers if the change was good for her. She responded by saying she was confident it was good for the company and that she thought it would be fun to learn new ways to do things. She obviously had embraced the positive side of the transition.

**7. Find someone to talk to.**

Sharing your feelings about a changing situation allows you to bounce off your ideas on a good listener, clear your mind of haunting thoughts, explore someone else's opinion, and in most situations dissipate your fears.

**8. Explore what is waiting in the new beginning.**

Check out what you have been told about how things will be in the future. Will it mean more opportunity? Will you be given a new chance for growth? Will you meet others who share a new point of view?

**9. Use transition as an impetus to learn.**

Life long learning is there for all of us if we choose to embrace it. Often times we don't know when that opportunity will present itself, but when it does we have the choice to disregard it as not important, not valuable to us, or we can gather new knowledge, open our minds, modifying our belief systems.

**10. Recognize that transition is a PROCESS. (endings, neutral zone, new beginnings).**

The transition process is cyclic. With every change, we go back through the three stages over and over again until we transition forward. Knowing this is how it must take place in order to truly experience new beginnings, allows us to remove some of the negative unknowns that were components of our earlier change experiences.

If you are the initiator of change your greatest tool is planning. Change without forethought can be devastatingly destructive. A good example is when organizations seek change without understanding its impact on the whole. I work with dentists who are making life altering decisions about how they will transition their practices. Many go forward without planning. They leave their practices of

30+ years without knowing how their decision will affect their staff and patients, what they will do after they are no longer “the dentist”, how their decision will affect their spouse or significant other, or even where they will spend the rest of their productive years. Studies show that most people spend more time planning their vacations than they do planning major changes that happen in their lives.

Transition plans include three components:

1. Vision
2. Strategic Action and Implementation Steps / Goals
3. A Timeline

Designing a plan requires open thought about the pros and cons of your new vision. What do you truly want and expect? What are the roadblocks that could hinder your progress? What have you done already to help you on your path forward? What are your personal and professional goals to ensure you stay on the right path? How long will it take you to accomplish your goals? (for a free ***Professional Transition Planning Worksheet*** go to [www.sastransitions.com](http://www.sastransitions.com)).

Once a plan is in place, the next step is communication. You need to fully explain and have understood your reason for change, its benefits, and its expected outcome. In an organization, you may want to write a position paper to share your point of view. Putting your vision in writing allows those affected by your decisions to take their time to analyze and process your ideas. In a smaller or more informal situation, sit down face-to-face with those who will be most affected by your decisions. Talk openly and honestly about the change process and discuss what each person might expect. Unfortunately, without that level of critical communication what often transpires is an initial response of

defensiveness that eventually will dominate the result. Avoiding as many pitfalls as possible should be your prime objective.

Now you are ready to act. Implement the steps that you have defined. Vision without implementation is lost on big ideas with no substance. By following your plan and completing the action steps forward, you will be inspired by how much you accomplish. Hopefully you will also gain the trust and respect of others by the demonstration of your commitment. If you run into a roadblock, determine how you can break it down or shift your direction to accomplish your task.

Your final step is to begin living your new vision and enjoy a new sense of fulfillment. With the uncertainties behind you, you can begin to let go of preconceptions and enjoy the rewards of your labor. Remember, not everyone will reach the same point of the transition process at the same time. This is a time for understanding and grace...a time to support one another until you eventually experience the positive side of change together.