

Navigating Now

Podcast -- "At the Table" Pat Lencioni: "[Change is Easy, Transition is Hard](#)"

Introduction: Change is Easy; Transition is Hard

As schools settle into the beginning of a third school year disrupted by the pandemic, school leaders and teachers feel a bit of "change *fatigue*." After two years of schedule disruptions and reimagining campus traditions, there is a sense of many campuses that change has become an increasingly ever-present aspect of the school's DNA. That said, it is important to remember that all changes, even positive ones, come with transitions. Change itself is concrete, decision-science, that lends itself well to a process of analysis and inspection. Transition, on the other hand, is a messy and emotional process that often involves a lot of things that humans prefer to avoid. Therefore, it is more important now than ever before for school leaders to closely examine the transitions that come with change and put to good use some important skills and strategies for managing these transitions in a positive way. Taking this step is essential to becoming communities that can pivot naturally, embrace change and move on from the losses transitions create.

Step 1: Identify the Loss

Every change, and therefore every transition, comes hand-in-hand with some form of loss. In order to successfully work through the change, it is important that all parties identify and name the types of loss that the change entails and acknowledge the necessary shifts that accompany these. These types of loss can happen both with things we see as "positive changes" as well as a result of "negative changes." Individuals who get a big promotion and therefore a new job are working under conditions of loss that mimic those of individuals who resign, get fired, or otherwise lose their job. In a similarly parallel situation, individuals who get married are working under similar conditions of loss to individuals who get divorced.

[Bill Bridges](#) (author of numerous noteworthy [books on change and change management](#)) catalogs the seven primary types of loss that people experience in any transition:

- Identity Loss -- This is to say "I identified myself as a certain thing and now I am a different thing" (this is either a change in name but can also be a change in identity connected to doing a specific type of work or role)
- Terf Loss -- The loss of terf can be physical in terms of spaces or more emotional in terms of job descriptions or other work to be done
- Loss of Structure -- The loss of structure involves the loss of plans or shapes to a day that worked in a particular fashion or unfolded in a particular order
- Loss of Control -- The loss of control is a loss of power, often over the decisions that are being made (or potentially decisions that were once made individually are now made by multiple people or require different inputs)
- Loss of Future -- The loss of future is a loss of a vision or a direction -- as things change in the present, the vision of the future necessarily shifts to follow

- Loss of Attachments -- The loss of attachments are losses connected to people (perhaps you saw the same people every day through work and now you no longer see them)
- Loss of Meaning and Purpose -- Separate from a loss of Future, the loss associated with Meaning and Purpose is about the shape of your life or the guiding principles -- "I always thought my life was about THIS, now this change..."

The first step to a successful transition is to name and identify the types of loss that the change entails. It is important to remember that this is an individualized process. People might experience the same event but might prioritize different types of loss.

Step 2: Ask yourself: "How am I going to respond?"

After you name and identify the losses that are connected with a particular change, it is important that you determine how you would like to respond to each of the losses. Bridges again provides a useful framework for considering the menu of potential responses by outlining the "4 R's" for a response:

- RESTORE -- To Restore after a loss is to do everything within your power to replicate the past conditions in a new situation
- REPLACE -- To Replace after a loss is to acknowledge that the loss came a loss of something like "Terf" or "Attachments" and to decide to fully replace those losses with new terfs, new attachments, or new identities
- REDESIGN -- To Redesign after a loss is to rethink how you can conceive of your relationships or identity within the new frame (if you lose one type of job, to redesign is to reconsider what type of job you will do, if you feel the loss of your work-based attachments, you can redesign how to spend time and cultivate friendships with the same work-friends)
- RELINQUISH -- To Relinquish is to let the thing you have lost go completely, to cut that identity, attachment, vision from your life.

Loss means you have to let it go before you can move along. Some change you CHOOSE; some change happens TO YOU. Change that you didn't pick can be hard, but you can make it work for you if you accept it and select a way to respond to each loss that is a part of the transition. It is important that we mourn the loss but then pick a path forward. You always have the opportunity to choose how you are going to respond to any change. Ask yourself, for each of the losses I have named connected to this change, what "R" will I pick?

Step 3: Ceremonialize "The End":

Once you have named the losses and chosen a response, it is important that you acknowledge the transition and move with purpose into the changed situation. When we don't take the time to ceremonialize and acknowledge our transitions, we can become further stuck in trying to avoid the transition in the first place.

Conclusion:

People struggle not with the change itself but with the process of undergoing a change which is actually a transition. Therefore, understanding the difference can make the difference between successful change and failure. Things often fail because we don't manage the emotional pieces of the transition well (from mergers to marriages) and we did not do the emotional work that we needed to do in order to make the change stick. This means honoring the emotional work connected to the change and following the three steps toward making the transition smooth.