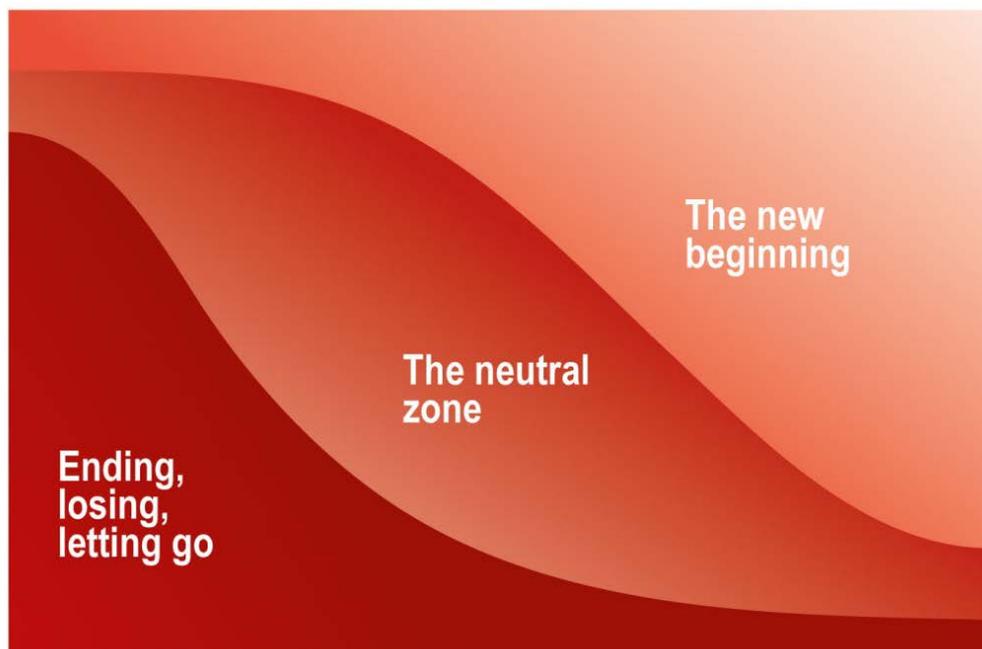


Helping people through stages of change

To achieve successful change, managers and leaders must help people work through clear and inevitable stages or transitions. William Bridges, in *Managing Transitions; Making the Most of Change*, identifies three stages:

- Ending, losing, letting go – need to disengage from old approaches, structures, relationships, roles, etc. and accept moving on
- The neutral zone – uncertainty and possible fear about what the future holds, mixed feelings
- The new beginning – clear about the future, feeling positive, re-energised, renewed sense of purpose

The transition through these phases is shown below:



Tips on managing the transition

Ending, losing, letting go	
<p>Before you can begin something new, you often need to end what used to be. According to Bridges, quite often it may not be the changes that people are resisting, but the accompanying losses and endings. It is important that you deal with these directly.</p>	
<p>Identify what is actually ending and who is losing what</p>	<p>Explain what will be different when the changes are complete. What is it that people will be asked to let go of – relationships, current methods, values, expectations?</p> <p>Be as specific as you can and avoid vague terms.</p>
<p>Accept the reality and importance of the subjective losses</p>	<p>Don't argue, as this is not the time to try and convince people, after all, loss is a subjective experience.</p>
<p>Don't be surprised at overreaction</p>	<p>People are probably reacting to the prospect of loss, not necessarily against the change. Sometimes people may be reacting from past negative experience.</p>
<p>Acknowledge the losses openly and sympathetically</p>	<p>It helps to talk openly – 'I'm sorry we are cutting our numbers. We are losing some good people.' This approach also gives others permission to express their feelings.</p>
<p>Expect and accept the signs of grieving</p>	<p>This might involve denial, anger, sadness, bargaining (to try and change the situation), fear and anxiety, disorientation or depression. Stay tuned in, express your own feelings, give people a chance to get things off their chests, provide empathy and reassurance, but don't reassure people with unrealistic suggestions of hope. Do what you can to restore people's sense of having some control over their situation.</p>
<p>Define what's over and what isn't</p>	<p>There can be a lot of confusion about what is changing often embellished by rumour. It is important to be clear about what will change and what continues or stays the same.</p>
<p>Treat the past with respect</p>	<p>Don't denigrate it. While it is important to move on to new and better ways, the trick is to do it without being too judgemental about the past. If you can, honour the past for what it accomplished. Also, if possible, let people take a bit of the old way with them, even if it is just symbolic.</p>
The Neutral Zone	
<p>Bridge's describes the neutral zone as a 'place between two somewheres', a phase where people have let go of the past but are not yet clear or confident about the future. New ways may be in place but awkward and not yet working satisfactorily.</p>	



Normalise the neutral zone	Explain to people that it is a 'normal' part of the change process. That it is OK to experience some confusion, loss of motivation and mix of feelings. That it is unrealistic to move straight from the past to the future.
Create temporary systems	Have systems or structures in place to help you through the transition. For example, regular briefing meetings. Set and monitor short-term goals. Be wary of expecting too much.
Strengthen relationships	<p>People can feel isolated and lonely, so create occasions for people to meet and interact – lunches, meetings and briefings. Consider whether you should establish a transition team to monitor and help manage this phase. It could have a particular focus on the issues affecting people.</p> <p>Keep interaction with intact teams as consistent as possible and evolve team norms and behaviours for new teams.</p>
Using neutral zone creatively	Often in this phase, like any break point, unexpected possibilities and fresh ideas may emerge in regard to how the organisation could act differently and better. Managers should consider creating a focus for this and encourage people to reflect on opportunities and possibilities.
New Beginnings	
This is the phase where the new world is largely in place. While often a time of relief and excitement, there may still be residual anxieties about whether the new ways will work, are we skilled enough, what is the risk of failure and so forth. It signals the end of the transition period and the support systems that were put in place for that phase. Performance expectations are likely to rise and there is now more a sense of 'business as usual'.	
Purpose	<p>People need to be reminded of the situation that was facing the organisation, and why the changes have occurred and the new beginning embarked upon. This may include reflecting on what might have occurred had the changes not been introduced.</p> <p>Accept that there will still be some ambivalence.</p>
A picture	Describe what the future will be like. This helps people to clearly understand the new world and how it will operate at quite a detailed level.
A transition management plan	Explain what is going to happen on the people side (training, information, announcement of new roles etc) as the new beginning is implemented. It is about when, what and how things will happen, step-by-step.
A part to play	Giving people a clear understanding of their role, responsibilities and relationships in the new world. In other words, how they fit in.
Reinforce the new beginning	Be consistent in applying plans, targets, rules and rewards. Try and achieve some quick wins to build confidence, create powerful symbols of the new identity and, most importantly, celebrate success.

