

# Planning for Transition - Yours!

By Reg Lang

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**Planners** are accustomed to dealing with change – its many challenges, its ongoing tension with persistence and stability, its management. But responding to or creating change in the professional arena is not the same as engaging change in our personal lives. "Professional" implies a degree of detachment not easily brought to (or necessarily appropriate for) changes affecting us personally: loss of a job or a relationship, decreased capacity through illness or accident, a major career move, retirement from active working life, among others. At such times, planning knowledge is liable to withdraw from the memory bank or slip into irrelevancy.

It's a common enough phenomenon: cobblers with shoeless children, physicians and therapists unable to heal themselves, caregivers neglecting their own care. Recognizing it isn't much help, however. Change is

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inevitable. How can we deal with it effectively and proactively, accessing our unique planning capabilities for service in the personal context?

"It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transitions," says organizational consultant William Bridges in *Managing Transition* (Addison-Wesley, 1991). He defines change as the arising of a new situation, a shift in our world, whereas transition is the

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psychological process people go through to come to terms with the change. Planning to manage change begins with the desired outcome and works backward to create or enable the conditions necessary for its enactment. Planning for transition starts where people are at and works forward "through the process of leaving the past behind, getting through the wilderness and profiting from it, and emerging with the new attitudes, behaviours and identity." We planners probably are more experienced with and better at planning for change. Planning for transition requires greater attention to the personal, the psychological, even the spiritual: pain of loss, erosion of meaning, fading of the familiar, anxiety over the unknown, fear of risk or commitment. When the transition is personal, it becomes ever so much harder to bring conventional planning to bear upon it.

Planning for personal transition presents a couple of special challenges. First is the need to be

reasonably clear about where you're at now and where you're heading to. From this ... to what? How comfortable we are with this question probably depends on what kind of transition it is. In a *deliberate* transition, such as moving from one job to another, the end point is known. When intent precedes action and the outcome is more or less predictable, the usual kind of planning can proceed (not to say it will be easy!). In an *emergent* transition, however, the new situation is unknown, as in ending a job and having no future prospects, or seeking to change your life without having a clear sense of what or how. Then, intent is likely to be revealed *through* action, characterized by experimentation and creative adaptability. In *Best Laid Plans*

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(Prentice-Hall, 1994), William Rouse identifies such a process of discovery as the key ingredient in life planning: finding out what we really want; envisioning alternatives and their possible consequences; charting a path and making choices so that we may truly live our values.

It should be that simple! For many of us, confronting what we *really* want to do and be is one of life's defining moments. This opens the second challenge: creating, holding and advancing one's agenda for change and transition.

Meeting these two challenges requires desire, courage, imagination, and maybe a helping hand. Just as communities and organizations in transition call upon planners for assistance, so also planners in personal transition can turn to trusted friends and colleagues, mentors, career counsellors ... and now, coaches.

Coaching, a label familiar from sports, has recently been reinvented for use in executive, professional and personal contexts. At best, it involves a supportive one-on-one relationship with a qualified coach, aimed at helping you clarify and achieve your goals, whether or not you're in transition. Good coaching enables you to tap into your full potential, increase your personal and professional effectiveness, and create the results you desire. Coaching assumes that only you know what's best for you. The coach is a guide, sounding board and source of encouragement, stimulus and accountability, but not

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an expert telling you what to do. The coaching agenda – life purpose, values, vision, plan, commitment, achievements and learning – is yours alone.

Together, you and your coach design the alliance that will forward this agenda, for your benefit. Typically, this begins with a meeting to consider your

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situation and needs, the coach's ability to help, and each party's willingness to work with the other. Some "practice" coaching may be included to give you a feel for what to expect and to test the relationship. If the mutual decision is to proceed, an intake session of about two hours follows to assess your issues, context and personal characteristics, and to design the coaching alliance.

A mutually acceptable contract is drawn up outlining the coach's qualifications, client's rights, coaching services to be provided (e.g., 30-45 minutes per week on the phone, supplemented with face-to-face sessions as required, all strictly confidential), projected duration, fees and payment.

Typically, coaching yields an array of benefits. Fresh perspectives on your situation and the changes affecting you. Clarity and focus on what's really important. Structure and direction to achieve your goals. A self-defined path

forward and coping skills to deal with the transition. Enhanced self-awareness, responsibility and empowerment. More balance and greater fulfillment in your life.

A final observation: if it makes sense to use whatever professional planning knowledge we can in our life planning, value is also added in the other direction. Life planning, coached or otherwise, can generate important learning and foster new capabilities well suited to managing change in these uncertain and turbulent times. In any case, most of us won't have much choice about whether or not to experience personal transition.

Shift happens. Better to build our response-ability, and know where to look for help.