

# **Making Change** ***(not just noise)***

**A Self-Guided Handbook**  
**On Advocacy, Change and Transition**

**By Roger Conner**  
With Creative Input from the Young Leaders of  
V.O.I.C.E.S., Napa, California

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**Question 1: Why do people change?**

**Answer:** There are only two reasons that people ever change.

1. Because they have to.
2. Because they want to.

**Exercise 1:**

**A. Name a change that you would really like to see at the place where you work, at an agency that you are familiar with, or in relationship to a problem that you care enough about that you would be willing to devote real time and effort to making the change:**

**B. Make a list of who would need to alter their current behavior or position in order for your change to happen.**

**C: Can you make them (the people in the box above) change?**

Yes

No

**Reflection: If you checked “yes,” you may not need this workbook. If you answered “no”, this workbook is designed to help you succeed.**

**Question 2 : Why do**

 people  
 systems  
 families  
 groups  
 institutions  
 (pick one)
 
**resist**

 sensible  
 needed  
 important  
 good  
 (pick one)
 
**changes?**

**Answer: Most resistance comes from three places**

1. **Self-interest:** Conflicted thinking about the consequences
  2. **Doubt:** The tug of war between **suspicion** (too good to be true) and **hope** (desire to believe what the change might be good).
  3. **Fear:** Fear of loss and of being lost.
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**Optional Exercise:**

You receive a call. The caller says you have won a new house, twice as big as your current house *if*:

1. You give them your house, and your mortgage (or rent payment) will be exactly the same as it is now;
2. They can't tell you exactly where it is, but promise it will be in your county and in a neighborhood that is at least as good as your own.
3. To claim the prize you have to close and move within the next 45 days.
4. You don't get to see the new house until after you close or enter into a binding rental agreement.

Write down your reactions as *quickly as you can*. Use *short phrases or words*. Don't try to judge or classify.


**How many of the items on your list express resistance rather than enthusiasm?** If you are like most people, you react mostly with questions and concerns.

**How many of the categories listed above--Self-interest, Doubt, Fear--are in your reactions?**

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**Reflection:** Most of us are familiar with the first two sources, self-interest and doubt, but not the third--fear of the feelings associated with loss and with *being* lost.

Scholars, writers and professionals who think about personal and organizational change all agree that any change in external conditions, such as job changes, reorganizations, marriage or divorce always requires an internal process of psychological adjustment.

William Bridges, a best-selling author and consultant calls this internal process of adjustment a "Transition." He explains that we know, instinctively, that change always comes with a psychological and emotional journey, it forces us to use energy to deal with the feelings associated with loss (endings) and of being lost (the neutral zone) before the new situation becomes familiar to us (the new beginning).

Most people are overloaded with changes over which they have no control, so they fear the effort of dealing with yet another Transition, *even if the change that is being proposed would be "good" for them in a "logical" sense.*

Rule # 1: Always assume that a proposal for change will generate resistance based on fears of the psychological and emotional stress of Transition, *especially if the resistance seems irrational or illogical.*

**A note about language:** The language of this guide differs somewhat from that in William Bridges' books. The Youth of VOICES adapted his terms—pre-ending, ending, the neutral zone, new beginning, and post-ending—to make it more accessible to youth; the core concepts are unchanged. Feel free to substitute the words that work for you!

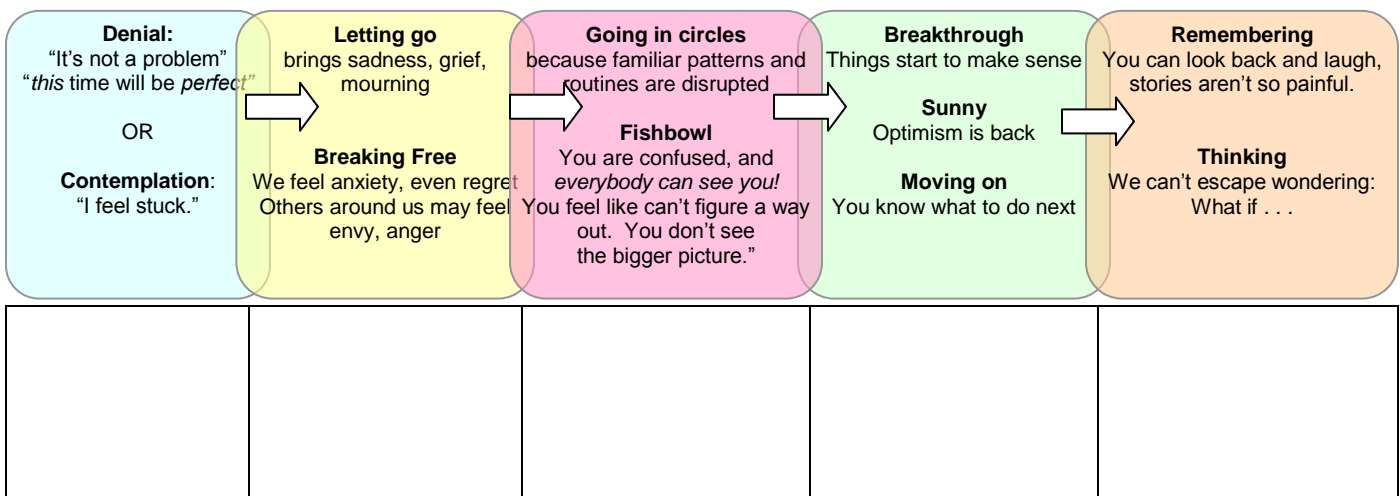
**HOLD IT::** Time out. I have a question here! I have to stop and think whether I think this guy Bridges is right.

He says people resist change because they don't like going through the "Transition." I need to know more about what he means by a "Transition."

**Question 3:** What goes on inside of us when we move; we graduate; we lose a job (or start a job); a relationship ends (or starts); we get taken from our families or get placed with a new family; we "age out" of foster care; our boss institutes new procedures or reorganizes our section? When something familiar, settled or established is change?

William Bridges says that change happens right away on the outside. On the inside it takes time to adjust. We have to go through a "Transition" with predictable stages.

**Try it out.** Think of two or three important changes that have happened for you recently. In the boxes below the pictures, can you locate yourself in one of the five stages?



(Bridges' terms are:

**Pre-ending,**

**Ending**

**Neutral zone,**

**New Beginning,**

**Post -Transition**

**Hint:** The process of Transition doesn't follow the clock. It isn't linear. The "stages" overlap. Sometimes we get stuck and go backwards.

Continue to the next page

## Exercise:

1. Think of a relationship, a job, or a position where you stayed though friends told you it was “time to move on.” Can you remember what you were thinking and saying? What held you back?

2. Think back to your reaction after the job or relationship was ended, after you or the other person did or said something so there was “no turning back.” Make a list of words that describe what you were feeling.

3. Can you remember a time when you or a close friend were “in between” jobs or relationships, when you/they were stumbling around, messing up, or perhaps worried about never having a good job or a good relationship again? Make a list of words that describe the feelings that came up.

4. Can you remember what it was like when you began to settle into the new job or a new relationship, when you suddenly realized you were talking mostly about the future, not the past?

5. Can you remember the first time you could tell someone the whole story of what you had been through without a trace of bitterness, and with a little bit of humor?

**What the numbers mean: 1 = Pre-ending/denial. 2 = Endings/Letting Go.  
3 = Neutral Zone/Going in Circles 4 = New Beginning/Breakthrough. 5 = Post-Transition, Remembering**

**WAIT A MINUTE: OK. So we all go through Transitions when we deal with change.**

**Question: This is about advocacy, not psychology! How does this relate to my work?**

**Answer: When we change jobs, or when we have to change our approach or let go of a failed strategy or realize that our position on an issue needs to change:**

Healing takes time.

When we feel stuck in the middle stages even though the “change” happened awhile ago, we are NOT doing something wrong. Change happens in minutes or hours, but transitions follow the rhythm of the heart and soul.

The people around you us are often be impatient. Our grief, anger, guilt and anxiety make them uncomfortable, so they tell us we should “get through” the transition process. They may tire of hearing us repeat the story, tell us to “stop living in the past,” or “move on.” The best reaction is to not, smile, say, “of course you are right.” And then find someone else to talk to.

If you discover that a friend who will let you mourn your losses without being impatient or watch you swim around in the fishbowl without giving you instructions on what you “should” do, be thankful and enjoy their company.

Most of us are being pushed constantly to make changes in our lives. Newspapers, magazines and TV are full of new diets, exercise programs, meditation plans, ways to quit smoking or organize our closets, ways to change our partners and children.

One of the reasons most diets, exercise plans and other such programs fail is that we are already dealing with the emotionally exhausting process of letting go and swimming in circles dealing with changes we can't control that there is little energy left to manage other transitions.

<p><b>Rule # 2: Failure is normal. Success is Rare. So if you don't succeed . . . let yourself cry a little. Then let go. Get Up. Start over.</b></p>
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**About the implications for understanding resistance from other organizations and decision makers.**

*Any leader in another group, any person who is in a position of authority to make changes in policy, procedures, rules or laws is in exactly the same position as you. They face a constant barrage of suggestions and demands for change. Some of these ideas don't pass the cost-benefit test (self-interest); some are rejected out of hand because they come from a hostile source (doubt). Decision-makers resist the others because of they fear of the Transitions that will be required for themselves and the people under them.*

*Resistance based on fear of Transition is a sign of institutional health, not a sign of weakness. Any person, organization or agency that tries to make too many changes at once will fail.*

**QUESTION: OK, I got it. Resistance is a given. Are you going to say we can minimize Resistance and help decision makers through the Transitions needed when we win?**

**Please turn to the next page:**

There is no formula. . . .

*But we have some ideas.*

## Option 1: Collaboration:

One of the ways to engage resistance is to involve others in the process of “naming the change.” Then it is “their” idea, not just “our” idea.

Can you think of a time you were able to work with someone who you *thought* was hostile, difficult, or hopelessly opposed? Can you remember what you thought of them *before* you started? After it was over? What changed?

Collaboration doesn't require us to have an “ending” for all of our opinions or attitudes. It does require us to *suspend* some of them for awhile.

Name person or a group that you would need to work with in order to come up with a *joint* proposal instead of your own:

Assume they would be willing to sit down with you or your group and try to agree on one thing . . . maybe even a small thing. (OK, maybe it would take a miracle. Work with me here!) Make a list of what would you need to let go of in order for the conversations to be productive?

Make a list of what *they* would need to let go of to collaborate with *you*.

# Option 2: Self-management

Look back at your answers to Exercise 1 on page 1.

Who has the authority to implement the change you want?

What have you or your peers done in the past to persuade or compel that person or institution to change? Write down a few words that you associate with your past strategy

Any plan for advocacy has to have at least two parts: *Strategy and Stance*.

## **Strategy:**

Strategy us how you use the resources at hand to cause a person, group or institution to change their current position or their expected behavior. All potential strategies can be placed along a spectrum from *PUSH* to *PULL*.

PUSH strategies might include public embarrassment, mobilizing a grass roots pressure campaign or urging a supervisor to order a change, alerting the press to the other person's failures, filing lawsuits, going on strike, and many more. PUSH strategies are designed to create enough heat that the decision maker "sees the light", enough pressure that he or she goes our way *whether or not s/he wants to*.

Pull strategies include gathering information, researching alternatives, suggesting compromises, or reframing your proposal so that it becomes a "win-win" outcome for competing parties and/or the decision maker.

## **Stance:**

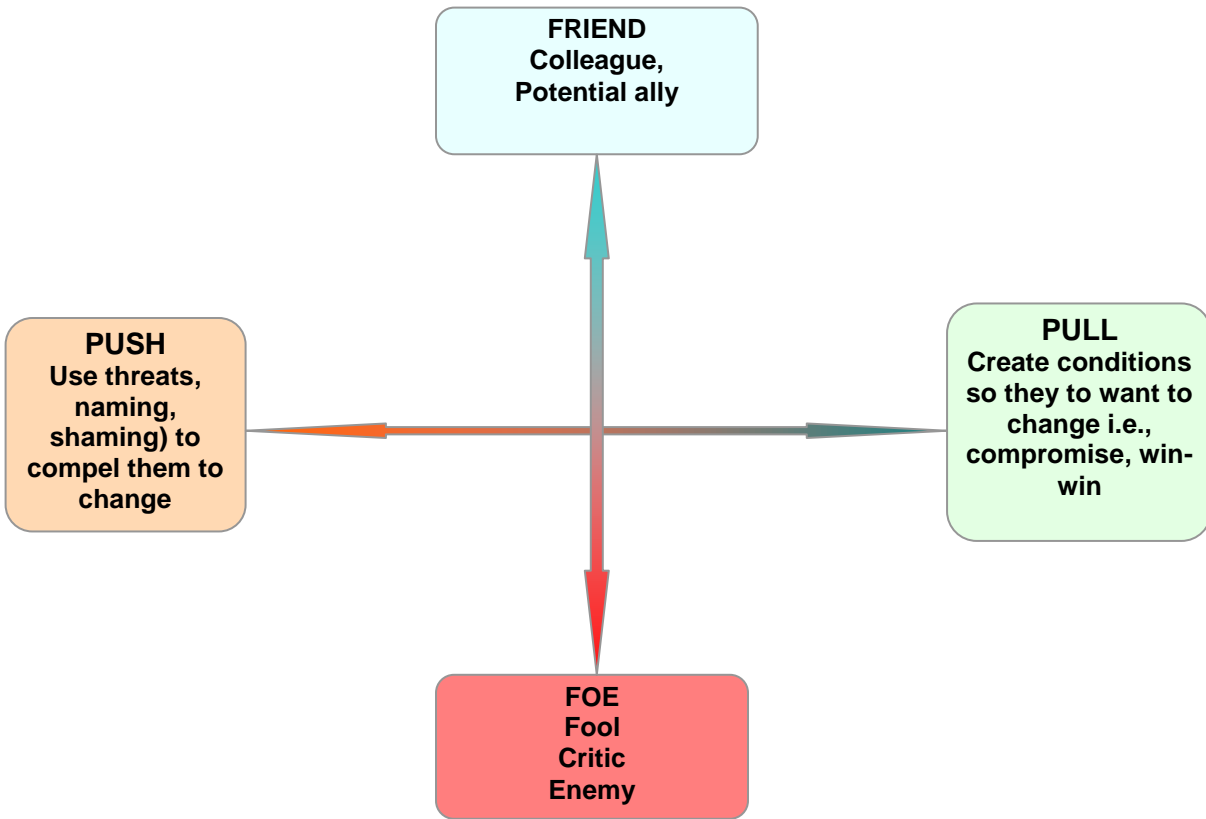
"Stance" is the attitude you have about the target audience or the decision maker. Stance is also arrayed along a spectrum from *FRIEND* to *FOE*.

A FRIEND stance means that we consider the target to be a colleague or a potential ally even though they may disagree with us from time to time.

A FOE stance means that we consider them opponents, critics or enemies.

Strategy tends to involve logical analysis. Stance is packed with emotion. When dealing with colleagues or potential allies, we tend to react with respect, compassion and curiosity; when dealing with critics, powerful opponents and enemies, we tend to react with fear, resentment and even loathing.

Every campaign--the combination of Strategy and Stance--can be located on the graphic on the next page:



Think about the most powerful people or groups that oppose the positions that you listed on page 1. What is their *stance* towards your group? What *strategies* do they use to defeat your side?

Think about your allies and your group. What is your stance towards the most powerful opponents or towards government decision makers who disagree with you? What has been your strategy to change or overcome them?

## Reflections:

***Most people who do this exercise place the other side in the bottom left quadrant—Foe Stance, Push Strategies. Most people place their own group in the top right—Friend stance, Pull Strategies.***

***A more accurate self-analysis would reveal something like this:***

1. Most of us choose our stance based on what the other person does  
*Actually we base our stance on what we perceive them to be doing..*
2. In a sustained disagreement, our *perception* of the other is subject to a systemic negative distortion.
3. As a result, people who have a disagreement that persists tend to assume the worst about other people's motives, and eventually they come to see each other as "Foes."
4. ***When you're in FOE stance, PULL strategies seem weak, risky and even dangerous.***
5. ***When you hold a Stance with respect and curiosity--such as treating those who disagree as "colleagues" or intelligent people with a different opinion--you can see the entire range of strategies, from PUSH to PULL, so you can switch back and forth when you need to.***

**Q: How does this relate to Resistance and the Transition Framework?**

**A: This is just one example of how an awareness of Transitions can help advocates be more rigorous and analytical about how to be more effective.**

- 1. Most advocates use *PUSH* strategies from a *FOE* stance. This will**
  - a. Make Resistance worse. We magnify the “doubt,” and our lack of empathy for others’ fear of loss “proves” that we don’t care about them.
  - b. Make it harder for those who may need to change to “let go” of their attachment to old ways of doing things, to their “status” as authorities in the hierarchy, or to beliefs and attitudes that they are connected to their very identities.
  
- 2. If we can hold a stance filled compassion, empathy and respect, ,**
  - a. The other person drifts towards the *FRIEND* stance (remember—most people’s stance is a *reaction*).
  - b. We can use *BOTH PUSH* and *PULL* strategies without falling into the *Advocacy Trap* (both sides using *Push Strategies* from a *Foe Stance*).**
  
- 3. When we** treat those who disagree as colleagues instead of enemies,
  - a. We are more likely to discern resistance base on fears about loss and being lost
  - b. We are more likely to understand the legitimate fears and concerns of the other side
  - c. The other side can more easily “come around” without having to admit that they were “wrong.”
  - d. When *PUSH* strategies are necessary—and they usually are—we can prevent our righteous indignation from turning into hatred.

# ***HOLD IT.***

***Q: Aren't you asking me to be a saint or something?***

**I am dealing with people who are dogmatic, stupid and wrong! They won't let go of outmoded ideas and policies, and we see the negative consequences?**

**A: At last. I'm getting some resistance out of you :}**

**You are right, of course. Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, they were able to do this. It's probably too much to ask of ordinary advocates like us.**

**It was just one idea. We encourage you to find others.**

***As you are doing so, please remember this:***

- 1. When people change, whether by choice or not, they go through an internal psychological adjustment process, a *Transition*.**
- 2. Transitions take emotional and psychological energy. They are difficult.**
- 3. People, groups and institutions resist our proposals for change for many reasons.**
- 4. *One* of the sources of resistance is the recognition that *our* proposal for *change* will require *them* to go through *Transitions*.**
- 5. Resistance based on the anticipation of the Transition is a given. *The only question is whether our approach to advocacy will make it worse.***

**One last rule:**

**Rule # 3: The problems will be there after we move on. Advocacy for systems change is not a 100-yard dash. It is like a relay race. Your job is to run your leg of the race well.**