



PROFESSIONAL TRANSITION: EMBRACING, MANAGING AND CHAMPIONING CHANGE IN YOUR BUSINESS

It's no secret that in business, if there's any one thing we can all depend on, it's change. No matter how many years a company has been in operation, just as a person's life is constantly changing, the life of a business is also constantly navigating through a perpetual ebb and flow of transition. While it may not always be expected (or welcome), by its very nature, it's transition that helps us close certain chapters, recognize important milestones and prepares us to move successfully toward whatever lies in wait.

RECOGNIZING THE CONSTANT NATURE OF CHANGE IN YOUR COMPANY

While change may seem like something we only encounter in our personal lives, it's important to remember transition holds true in our professional capacities as well. Transition is one of business' great equalizers, occurring in organizations of every size and scope as well as every industry; asserting itself in both financially thriving and turbulent times. Sometimes change is so infinitesimal that it's almost impossible to perceive, such as a missed phone call or an ignored email that may have led to a new client. Other times change can be overwhelming, such as extensive periods of challenging economic stretches where we feel completely overwhelmed and incapable of altering the course we're on. Yet, even then, we are at the epicenter of some type of transition - recognizing this process, and more specifically, embracing it, can truly make all the difference when it comes to prolonged corporate health and sustained operational longevity.

UNDERSTANDING TRANSITION: A STEP BY STEP BREAKDOWN OF HOW SUCCESSFUL CHANGE HAPPENS

Take a minute and think about your honest response to changing moments within your organization. Do you feel excited? Anxious? Dread? If you're like most entrepreneurs, you probably feel a combination of emotions when faced with transition. Many people find that, by nature, they don't actively pursue change. The same holds true in business. While this makes sense in times of prosperity, many businesses don't proactively engage with transition when their company is in flux. Why? Because sometimes it's simply easier to continue to tread water (or attempt to!) where we are, where we know and where we are comfortable rather than venture out to deeper, unknown seas.

Fortunately, no matter what your inclination towards transition, it is possible to redefine your entire mentality of what change means to you and how you welcome it into your business. How? By systematically breaking down the transition process into smaller, more manageable steps. In William Bridges *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, he outlines transition into five specific steps:

Ending -- AHA! -- Grace--AHA!-- Beginning

Regardless of the type of transition your business is currently encountering, Bridge's outline can help. Entrepreneurs and business owners need to first recognize that transition is always the mark of something ending. To truly transition, something must first end, whether it is a job, a relationship, or an entire career. An example may be the retirement of a long-standing executive within your company who has brought you a great deal of success through his/her efforts. Recognizing the certainty of this change can deliver your first transitional "AHA" moment. You can't avoid this change. The executive IS retiring and there's nothing you can do to prevent it. Sure, you can make offers to prolong his/her employment, but at some point, he/she WILL retire, and this is certain. Next, it's important to enter the "Grace" phase; this is where it's critical to recharge, replenish and refocus. Instead of focusing on the retirement of one person, focus instead on the company's strengths as a whole and allow yourself time to clear your head in order to make the necessary decisions to replace the retiring executive. A successful Grace period is followed by a second "AHA" moment - it's here that we experience clarity about the next steps and a future course of action. You may begin to see strengths in lower level management that you hadn't noticed before; the types of strengths needed to not only replace the executive, but to take the company to new heights. Taking the time to recognize and effectively move through the first four phases of transition is the only way to help ensure your business remains relevant, salient, and continues its momentum forward to the ultimate conclusion of any transition period: a new beginning.