

ON COURSE

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Compass Team:

- Jennifer Lane CFP
- Lauren Gadkowski CFP
- Theresa Blanchette CPA
- Al Jean CPA
- Nancy Sartanowicz MEd
- Heather Dmochowski RP

Phone:

888-320-9993

Web:

CompassPlanning.com

NAVIGATING THROUGH TRANSITIONS

Moving from 2004 to 2005 is a lightning-quick transition that takes just a flip of the calendar page. Remembering to write 2005 instead of 2004 on our checks generally takes us a few weeks longer and involves a couple of slip-ups. Transitions are not always so distinct or easy as we move from one phase of our lives to another.



JENNIFER LANE

Many of our clients are involved in a transition of some kind – marriage, parenthood, job change or job loss, divorce, relocation, retirement, etc. Our role is to help them to consider how

this transition will affect their finances and what to do about that. In our discussions, we look at both the concrete, practical information *and* the emotions and feelings that are present. Changes mark endings and new beginnings and these situations often bring up anxiety and stress.

William Bridges, Ph.D., author of *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, describes a transition as a gradual, psychological reorientation process that is our own internal adaptation to change. He describes the process in three stages: Endings, Neutral Zone, and New Beginnings.

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I've created some composite stories to illustrate the journeys we make through personal transitions. I hope these stories help you to identify and claim the stage of transition you now occupy.

Moving through transition is a natural process that cannot be hurried or short-circuited.

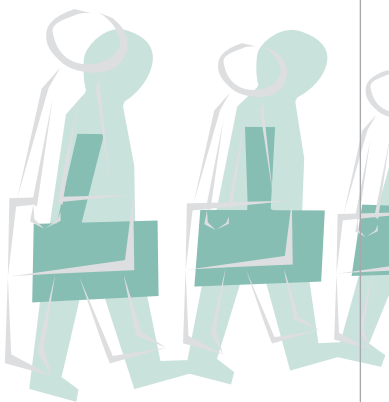
It takes however long it takes.

THE THREE STAGES OF TRANSITION

Endings is a stage in the transition process for examining in a personal way what is happening to us and how we feel about it. What is ending? What will we lose? What impact will these losses have on my life?

The Neutral Zone is the second phase of the transition process and this is where we have left one world and not yet entered another. Confusion reigns, and what used to work, no longer works. It is a place in between one personal identity and another. Waiting and wondering are natural states in the Neutral Zone.

New Beginnings mark the third phase of the internal transition process and it is where new possibilities begin to emerge. We cannot grasp the new possibilities if our hands are tightly clasped on the old ways. We are moving into the unknown and that is always something of a gamble.



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TRANSITIONS AND FINANCIAL PLANNING

Life happens. And life always brings change – sometimes the changes are predictable and sometimes the changes are random. William Bridges says, “Dealing successfully with change is a survival skill these days.” I would second that – and assure you that my goal is to help you to manage your wealth as you respond to the changes in your life. It is my privilege to learn your stories as we determine the best course of action for your financial well-being.



MARY’S STORY

Mary lost her high-paying job in a dramatic way that was totally unexpected. Her **Ending** was an immediate severing of what she had known with no rationale for why it happened. Mary lost her job, her salary, her benefits, her status, her coworkers, and her daily routine – all in one vivid moment.

Mary took a few weeks to let her feelings settle, then took a giant step into the **Neutral Zone** and got a transition job in a local bookstore. Mary said, “I need to be with my thoughts for awhile,” and recognized that this was not the time to seek a replacement job for the one she had lost. Mary wisely understood that recovering from the shock of losing her job would take time – and she needed some income while she was recovering.

I’ve no doubt that when Mary is ready, she will find a new job that uses all her skills and abilities. She understands that now is the time to be in the Neutral Zone, slowly gathering her new identity for a New Beginning.

ALTHEA’S STORY

After 20 years of marriage, Althea’s husband divorced her and left her with a comfortable income. It was a regrettable **Ending** that Althea did not easily accept and this kept her stuck in place for a couple of years. She hesitantly entered the **Neutral Zone** and, rather than using that time and space for rearranging her thoughts, Althea bought things. She spent lots of money to try to stop the confusion she was feeling and distract herself from her own anxiety. Althea’s purchases gave her some momentary relief, but did not help her to move through the **Neutral Zone** toward a **New Beginning**.

It’s important to allow yourself to be in that place of “not-knowing” – the **Neutral Zone**. That’s where we rearrange our mental furniture and create the space to accommodate new ideas, attitudes, and perspectives.

Several months have passed, Althea’s journey through the **Neutral Zone** is now drawing to a close and she is taking steps toward **New Beginnings**. She has a gentleman friend, a new job, and her relationship with her grown daughters has greatly improved. Most importantly, Althea no longer identifies herself as a divorcee. She is moving toward financial self-sufficiency at her own pace and shows strong indication that she will succeed.

ROBERT’S STORY

Robert, a successful salesman, carefully planned his transition to retirement long before he implemented it. He decided when he would transition to part-time work, how he would do that, and where. Robert’s plan included selling his home, moving to New Hampshire, and working from his home.

His **Endings** were carefully worked out and could have unfolded without a hitch – except they didn’t. In the **Neutral Zone** of making this plan a reality, Robert and his wife realized that it wasn’t a great idea for him to work from home. So, he got an office outside his home, thinking that this would seal the deal. A few N.H. winters later, Robert and his wife began thinking of relocating to Florida.

Clearly, Robert is a planner and once a decision is made, he wants to implement it. Robert and his wife were uncomfortable with the confusion of the Neutral Zone, especially because they planned so carefully about this phase of their lives. I advised them to vacation in possible relocation sites and try them out before they make a decision. Their New Beginning needs some reality testing without great risk. Relocating yourself and your business is a very big step that involves financial risk, and may throw Robert and his wife back into the Transition loop.