

Navigating Leadership Transitions

The successful navigation of a change in leadership, particularly one involving the departure of a founder or long-term director, requires that we consider the human side of change. This includes how individuals—such as staff, board members, and others involved in the organization—move through three stages of transition.

<i>Transition Stage</i>	<i>Transition Event</i>	<i>Feelings may include...</i>	<i>Actions leaders can take that often help...</i>
SAYING GOODBYE >	Person gives notice or is asked to leave their position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Denial ▪ Anxiety ▪ Loss ▪ Fear ▪ Anger ▪ Sadness ▪ Release/relief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make space for the expression of feelings ▪ Recognize/celebrate contributions of the departing leader ▪ Acknowledge how the organization’s history/legacy will continue
MESSY MIDDLE >	Acting or interim is in place Recruitment is underway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uncertainty ▪ Creativity ▪ Confusion ▪ Anger ▪ Frustration ▪ Hard to focus ▪ Desire for order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Practice patience; live with ambiguity (possibilities) ▪ Communicate what is known and not yet known about the change in leadership ▪ Communicate what the process will be for moving forward ▪ Stay open and flexible; plans may change
MOVING FORWARD >	New leader begins work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Optimism ▪ Uncertainty ▪ Resentment ▪ Excitement ▪ Confidence ▪ Exhaustion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide orientation and support to incoming leader (including: encourage a realistic work load) ▪ Show appreciation to those who took on extra duties during the transition ▪ Communicate about what has changed and what has not changed ▪ Communicate about what staff and board members can do to help the organization move forward ▪ Celebrate!

This three-stage model was adapted from the work of William Bridges.