

Transitions

A bridge from here to there

A personal and reflective process for
clergy, ministers and leaders
moving parishes or positions

John Hornblow



Introduction: John Hornblow

Making a good transition is possible, but is not necessarily a given. Dealing with both the external factors and the internal complexities of a transition is always challenging. The more thought given before and throughout the transition the better the outcome. Rush into a transition or think you know it all and the chances are high you will have more conflict, have damaged relationships, and have lost many opportunities for personal growth that cannot be retrieved. That outcome can be avoided. Time given to considering the material below will, I hope, maximise the possibility of a really good transition for you and others impacted by your transition. This guide was developed from my own experience of many personal transitions and from over three decades of coaching others through their transitions. I pray that it will guide you to intentionally reflect, think, pray, dialogue and decide so the outcome can be satisfying for all involved.



Process

This resource can be used in a variety of ways. *You will need a journal or notebook in which to record your thoughts and insights.* To maximise the learning set aside time in your day, find a quiet uninterrupted place and write, mind-map or sketch your insights and work through each Journal Exercise, answering the questions. It can be even more beneficial to take a few days out and go on retreat. Either way, there will others that you may want to involve at certain times: family, supervisor, spiritual director, the people you will leaving behind and the people you will moving to. Successful transition takes time, engagement and intentionality: but it will be worth it. I know from experience! Blessings as you journey on.

Journal Exercise 1: Non-dominant hand exercise



Try this for fun...

Take a pen, hold it in the hand you don't normally write with, and for each statement write in your journal:

1. Your name
2. The name of someone, anyone, who has made a transition really well
3. Briefly write one thing you are proud to have achieved in your present position
4. Finally draw a picture of something you love doing when you have spare time or money.

Reflect:

How did you feel writing with your non-dominant hand? Probably one answer would be "a little more uncomfortable" than writing in your normal manner.

How might this quick exercise be like the transition that I will be undertaking?

Journal Exercise 2: Leaving and getting started

Think about, and record your reflections:

On this transition, what do I know so far is going to happen to me?

What are the implications of these for me?

What do I know already is the story of the people I am going to?

What are my dreams and hopes for the new situation?

Reflect on a leader who has made a transition really well. What made this "best practice"?

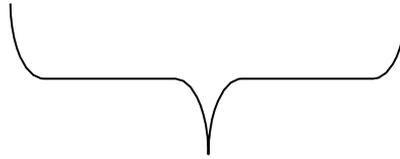
When you are well settled into the new role, and look back—and those you lead look back—what specifically do you want people to say about you and that process of transition?

Journal Exercise 3: Name the Transition

Ask yourself an important question, and record your reflection. "What do I need to do to ...

END WELL?

BEGIN WELL?"



Equals a successful and satisfying transition.

Assumption: **No two transitions are exactly the same.**

Questions:

How will this transition be different from previous ones for me?

In what specific ways is it similar to previous transitions I have made?

What specific challenges do you face making this change?

Assumption: **You are a leader who learns.**

Questions:

What have you learnt from previous transitions that will assist you make this transition a beneficial experience for:

Yourself?

The people you are leaving?

The people you are going to?

Reflect and record your responses and insights in your journal.

Journal Exercise 4: A Biblical Perspective

A significant amount of the Bible records the story of people in transitions.

Identify a person, or group in transition in the Bible.

Where were they moving from? to?

Within themselves?

Within their environment, context?

What specifically helped them?

What resistance did they encounter?

Within themselves?

From others?

How did they overcome this?

What losses were there for them in making this transition?

What specifically did they gain from the change?

Journal Exercise 5: What is Transition?

The book *Moving On* talked a lot about change which occurs when something ends and something new or different begins (and then continues). Between these two points is the transition. It is here that people have to learn to let go of the old and embrace the new, which can be a stressful experience. It requires people to move out of their comfort zone. Most of us have a strong response to transition.

One of the strongest responses we experience during any transition is a sense of loss and grief. Unless this is managed, people cannot move on. Types of loss in a transition include:

Security - Competence - Relationships - Sense of direction - Territory

How you respond to a transition depends on:

The speed of transition

The amount of control you have over the transition

The degree to which the transition impacts on you

How much it affects your values

Your personality

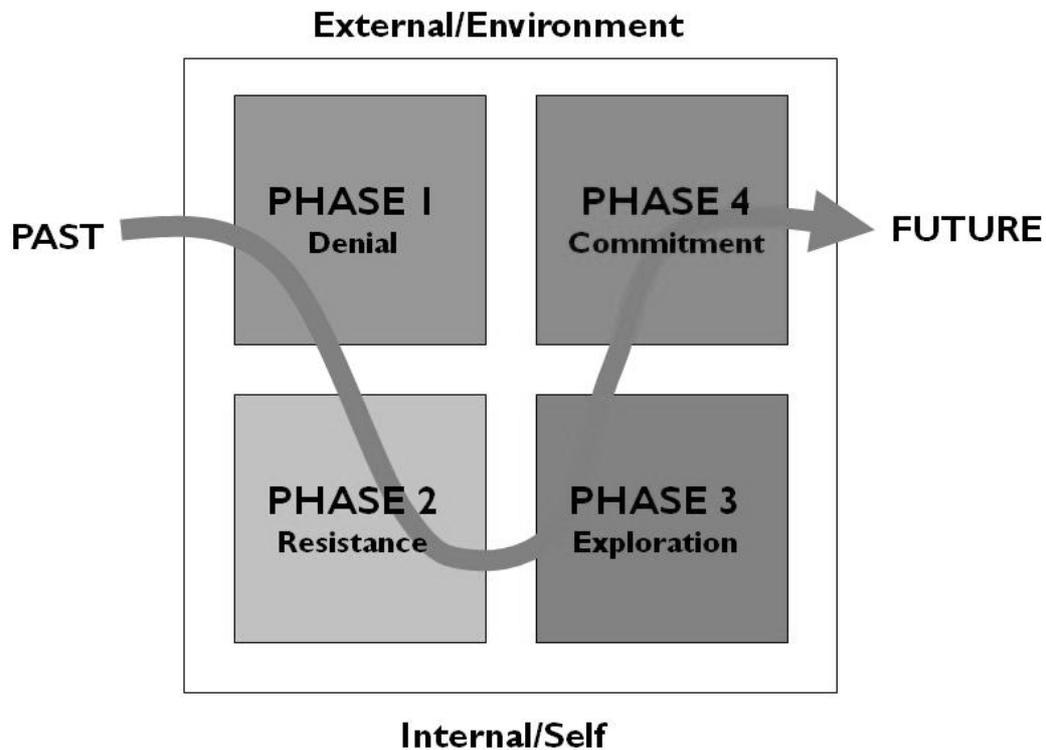
and your personal history

Think of the transitions you have gone through in the past. Draw the table below in your journal for each major transition. For each transition name 'From' and 'To', and the Losses and Gains.

Transition From	Transition To	Losses	Gains

The Transition Process

Individuals may move through a series of phases during the process of transition. Although the pattern is fairly predictable, they may move backwards and forwards as they confront and resolve their losses and gains and as new information becomes available.



Where in the process are you with this change?

What are you needing in order to move forward?

Other people are also impacted by your transition. What strategies could you use to assist people with your transition?

Management Strategies for Denial	Management Strategies for Commitment
Management Strategies for Resistance	Management Strategies for Exploration

Journal Exercise 7: Resisting Change and Transition: Strategies

How can you handle resistance: in yourself or others? It's important to remember that you are not the only person journeying through a period of transition. Both the people you leave behind and those you will meet in your new appointment will also be experiencing change.

Some form of resistance to transition is inevitable. It occurs for many reasons, including fear of the unknown, concern about being left worse off, perceived loss of power, personal costs and low control in the process. It is important to acknowledge objections as real and respond to them.

To manage resistance, the following may help:

- **Encourage** overt resistance to get problems out in the open.
- Covert resistance, often masked as passive-aggressive behaviour, is harder to deal with because it is indirect and harder to pin down.
- Create a safe place that allows **honest communication**. People may not be comfortable expressing their true reasons for resistance.
- Be clear and honest about what **the likely costs** of the transition will be – ensure all involved have an accurate picture.
- Work on **communication** to ensure that people understand what the transition entails and feel comfortable expressing honest resistance openly.
- Help people **understand the individual implications** of transition so that resistance is identified, and can be brought to the surface and overcome.
- Identify whether **an objection is valid**. Use a “What-if” approach. When an objection is raised ask: “What if that objection (name) was provided, or met...how would you feel about the change?”
- Overcome valid objections by determining what the objectors have to gain (the benefit to them) from the transition — then sell the transition to them by **presenting ‘what’s in it for them’**.
- Use your knowledge of personality profiles, such as MBTI, to tailor your approach to others, taking into account your own - and the other person’s - preferences.

Which of the above strategies have helped you to handle your own resistance?
Handle others' resistance?

What questions do I want answered?

How may I get answers?

What questions may the people you are going to want answered?

How may I provide them?

Helping Children through Transition

Some ideas to help children through a transition:

- Alert them in advance
- Set limits and enforce them consistently
- Give clear, concise, simple directions. State them slowly and clearly
- Give auditory and visual reminders
- Use props and cues to assist children with special needs
- Team children of various abilities up in a buddy system

Involve children in the move as early as much as possible. Age-appropriate tasks or responsibilities can help children have a sense of control over their situation. For instance, younger children might be allowed to select where they would like to sleep, while older children might play more active roles in the selection of their new home.

Try to maintain daily routines. While children are adjusting to new homes, neighbourhoods, and schools, parents can provide some comfort by keeping some things the same. For instance, having the same nap times, morning and night time routines, and meal times might be comforting especially for younger children.

Be patient with children and empathize with their feelings. In some cases, children may not like their new schools, neighbourhoods, or living arrangements despite their parent's best efforts. If this happens, parents should not become frustrated or angry. Instead, they should talk openly with children about their anxieties and reassure them that their feelings are normal. It will take some time to adjust to new surroundings.

Help children make new friends and get them involved in their new communities. Participating in activities such as camps, after school programs, and neighbourhood clubs is an excellent way for children to make new friends. Also, adults can use these activities to meet other parents in the neighbourhood.

Visit new schools to see if orientation programs are available for newcomers. These orientation programs can help alleviate many worries children have about their new school, such as knowing their way around and where their lockers are.

Look for warning signs of children not adjusting well. Long term anxiety, depression, significant disruptions in sleep, poor socialisation, and failing grades may indicate that children need professional mental health services to help them adjust to their new environment. Seek help early.

Journal Exercise 8: Consider those you are leaving

How are the people I'm leaving behind coping with the prospect of change?

What can I do to assist them in this process?

What is going to be happening for the people or team I am going to?

What anxieties or concerns may the people I am going to have?

How is my leadership style different to what they have experienced?

Journal Exercise 9: Starting a new position

Maximising the first 3 months in a new position

There is no magic formula that will assure smooth success, but the following steps can help you make the most of your new situation:

Do your homework: Take the time to learn all you can about your new appointment to gain as much knowledge as possible.

Orient yourself: If no one else has done it for you, design and implement your own orientation programme.

Listen up: Your short and long term success depends on other people. The team you are joining was in place before you arrived and will be in place after you leave. Look for ways to fit in. Build a sense of camaraderie and become part of the team. Don't go it alone.

Keep perspective: It's easy to be infatuated or disillusioned with the people, the processes and the purpose of your new appointment. Keep your "antenna" raised as to what is happening around you.

Start small: Coming from the outside you'll see lots of things that you will question and be tempted to change. Fix your aim on one to begin with! In other words: be still, listen to what's going on and set your sights on small, achievable changes.

Be tactful: Don't rush to judgment. Let go of your own preconceived notions and try to understand. You may learn something!

When I undertook my last transition, which of the "First 3 months" steps above did I intentionally do?

How can I use the steps in the change I am going into?

Journal Exercise 10: The First 90 Days

For deeper understanding it is recommended that you read the excellent book *First Ninety Days: by Michael Watkins* from which this section is adapted, which we acknowledge with thanks. While the context is a secular job, it is very relevant to ministry transition.

The actions you take during the first three months in a new job will largely determine whether you succeed or fail. Transitions are periods of opportunity.

The following questions have been sourced and adapted from the book. By answering the questions, you will reveal your personal vulnerabilities and identify external forces that could hold you back in your new position.

Questions about You:

What has made you successful so far in your career/ministry?

Can you succeed in your new position by relying on those strengths?

If not, what skills do you need to develop?

Are there aspects of your new job that are critical to success but that you prefer not to focus on?

How will you compensate for your potential blind spots?

Questions about the Organisation:

How has this organisation/church performed in the past?

How do people in the organisation/church think it has performed?

How were goals set?

What happened if goals were not met?

If performance has been good, why has that been the case?

What is the organisation/church's?

- Strategy?
- Structure?
- Technical Capabilities?
- Culture?
- Politics? (*And yes, the church has all these like any other human organisation!*)

If performance has been bad, why has that been the case?

Do primary issues reside in the organisation/church?

History of Change in the organisation/church?

What efforts have been made to change the organisation/church?

What happened?

Who has been instrumental in shaping the organisation/church?

Journal Exercise 11: Managing Expectations and so minimising conflict

People have expectations of Clergy, for example that they will be available 24/7, even when on holiday; that they will be the answer to all the world's ills and be effective in all areas of the ministry. The people you are going to may have preconceived expectations of you. Identifying and managing these expectations is crucial otherwise conflict may ensue.

In your experience how have people traditionally seen a Clergy person?
What has specifically changed?
What expectations continue to be relevant?
What are the implications of this change of perspective on me?

Journal Exercise 12: Planning your Transition

Think about the OUTCOME I'd like to see: make notes in your Journal:

Key Strategies: what key strategies will significantly contribute to this outcome

The Process: What specific activities or actions will you take to assist those strategies, who will take them, when, what support and resource may they need.

Review: Review is essential and often the most overlooked element. Plan time to review and make adjustments if necessary.

When will I review these strategies and actions? Diary a time.

Examples of actions you could take would be, maybe tick the ones you will take:

Before entry

Read whatever you can find about where the group/church/organisation is going, it's structure, performance and people.

Look for external comments or what external observers may say such as members of the community, suppliers, customers, former employees, recent retirees. Ask these people open-ended questions.

Talk with your predecessor.

Talk to your new boss (if you have one) or other senior people who can be honest with you

Write down your first impressions.

Compile an initial set of questions to guide your structured inquiry once you arrive.

Soon after entry

Review detailed operating plans, performance data and personnel data.

Meet one on one with your direct reports, or key people and ask them the questions you compiled.

Assess how things are going from the inside.

Test strategic alignment from the top down. Ask people at the top what the vision strategy is.

Then see how far down into the organisation those beliefs penetrate.

Ask your questions from the first stage.

The end of the first month

Gather your team to feedback your preliminary findings. You will learn more about the group and its dynamics.

Analyse a couple of key processes with a group to map out and evaluate the processes.

Meet the key people—invite them out to coffee. You will learn how things work at interfaces among functional areas within the organisation. What problems do they perceive that others do not?

Seek out the natural historians. They can fill you in on the history, culture and politics of the organisation, and they are potential allies and influencers.

Meet with your boss again and discuss your observations.

Journaling Exercise 13: Communicating a Transition

Communication is a key part of the transition process. You need to communicate the importance of the transition to all involved, as well as timeframes and tasks. Planning your communication is as vital as planning the transition itself.

Define the Purpose

Why do I need to communicate?

What is my objective? What do I want my communication to achieve?

What do I need to say? What's the message I want people to hear?

What do I want my audience to think, do or feel as a result of the communication?

Define the Audience

Who do I need to communicate with?

How receptive are they likely to be to my message?

How can I minimise their switching off?

Determine the Format

What words will I use to get the message across?

How will I disseminate it - what medium will they be most receptive to?

When will I say it?

Risk Management

What could go wrong?

How can I avoid this?

What contingencies should I prepare for?

Review

How will I know the message has been received correctly?

What went well?

What could I do differently next time?

Think of the transition you are about to make and plan your communication using this process.

Journal Exercise 14: Take time to think about The Big Picture

Towards the end of the first few months in the new situation you will have gathered a great deal of knowledge about your new position. Now would be good to think about all you have learned. It may be that you can include others in this process. Some things to consider would be:

Vision and Strategy

What is the stated vision and strategy of the church/organisation?

Is it really pursuing that vision and strategy? If not why not?

If so, is the strategy going to take the church/organisation where it needs to go?

People

Who is capable and who is not?

Who can be trusted and who cannot?

Who has influence and why?

Processes

What are the key processes and policies of the church/organisation?

Are they performing acceptably in terms of quality, reliability and timeliness? If not, why not?

Landmines

What lurking surprises could detonate and push you off track?

What potentially damaging cultural or political missteps must you avoid making?

What are the most formidable barriers to making the needed changes?

What new capabilities need to be developed or acquired?

Early Wins

In what areas (people, relationships, processes, or services) can you achieve some early wins?

Challenges and Opportunities

In what areas is the church/organisation most likely to find stiff challenges in the coming year?

What can be done now to prepare them?

What are the most promising unexploited opportunities?

What would need to happen to realise their potential?

Culture

Which elements of the culture of the church/organisation should be preserved?

Which elements need to change?

Journal Exercise 15: Hopes and Dreams

As you conclude these exercises, what will motivate you and the people you are with will be the hope that their dreams and yours can be realised. There is real energy in refreshing what these may be.

What dreams or hopes may the people have?

What are my dreams or hopes?

