



LEADING CHANGE AND LIVING TO TELL ABOUT IT

By Dr. William Hoyt

Hit The Bullseye, Inc. exists to foster a peer learning environment for people leading groups of congregations (judicatories and associations) through systemic transformational change. We lead denominational leaders and congregations through transformation and spiritual, financial and numerical reproduction through: Assessment and Strategic Planning, Consulting, Mentoring, Coaching, Pastoral and Lay Leader Development/Training, Capital Campaigns.

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Just because everything is different doesn't mean anything has changed.

—Irene Peters

In our fast-changing world, an effective leader must lead for change. Failure to do so is to fail as a leader. But leading change is difficult because people have an innate aversion to change. The highways of pastoral leadership are littered with the remains of those who have not survived the journey.

If you are a change agent and want to live to tell about it, you have no better friend than William Bridges. In his writings on change and transition Bridges draws a map for survival. What follows are a few basic things learned from Bridges that have proven helpful to me as leader over the years.

Change and Transition Are Not the Same Thing

Most churches are willing to change just about anything in order to keep things the same. This being true and our natural aversion to being the “changee” rather than the “changer” notwithstanding, leading change is the easy part. Leading transition is the hard, but essential part. It's the time-consuming part of being a change agent.

Change is an external shift, something that happens around us, outside of us. It may be sudden and immediate, the result of an order given from “on high.” Transition is an internal shift. It's what happens inside of us. It's the way we come to terms with the change. Transition is the process of making the changed state “our

own.” Transitions take time because transitions affect our perspectives, thoughts, feelings, esteem, values, and choices.

The Three Phases of Transition

The first phase of transition is “Letting Go.”

“You cannot steal second with your foot on first.” You must leave where you are and in the church way too many people have spent their whole lives standing on first base. Change and transition begin with an ending. People must let go of the way things used to be.

Change inevitably produces grief. Grief by definition is a “sense of loss.” Transition work starts with asking, “Who loses what with these changes?” and “How can I help them grieve the loss and embrace a better future?” You must create a “pain plan.”

The second phase is the “Neutral Zone.”

This is the most difficult phase. It's full of uncertainty and confusion. The old scripts with the familiar ways of doing and relating have been shredded. The new scripts have not been written and cannot be read and followed.

The neutral zone is uncomfortable, so people are driven to get out of it. Successful transition, however, requires our spending time in the neutral zone. This time is not wasted, for it is where the creativity and energy of transition are found and the real transformation takes place.

Continued on next page