

Building Resilience through Life's Transitions

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I have been lucky to be surrounded by strong, confident women who have guided me through life's rollercoaster. Many of these women who have provided support through life's changes have been the colleagues I have worked with throughout my time in higher education. Working at the same institution for multiple years provided the opportunity to build and sustain these relationships. Then, I moved to a new city and changed to a job outside of fraternity/sorority advising. While the move and the job are in alignment with my personal and professional aspirations, I would not do this work justice if I did not share how nervous I was throughout the process. Was I capable of contributing to the profession in another functional area? How would I make new friends? Would my colleagues trust and believe in me? Would this be a seamless transition or was I gearing up for a rollercoaster? During this time, I turned to a person who reminded me of the value I always hold at the top of my list, resiliency. And the question continued to whirl through my mind; how will resiliency help me through transition?

As we began another fall semester and a new school year, did you experience a change? Have you started a new job lately? Are you in a new relationship? Is coursework becoming part of your normal routine? Did you experience a shift in your personal and/or professional world? Chances are you have experienced change in the first few months of the semester and are in transition. Change and transition are constant and learning how to best overcome change comes from building resiliency.

Transition is the process a person goes through when change occurs. According to William Bridges (1991), transition happens in three phases: (1) ending, losing, and letting go, (2) the neutral zone, and (3) new beginnings. Each person will have their own pace while moving through these phases. You will know when you have progressed to the new beginning phase when you feel confident in a new role or have found the balance necessary for you.

According to the American Psychological Association (2015), resilience is the method one uses to adapt to change, adversity, and/or a significant life event. Methods to build resiliency, which are presented below, are generalized as a catalyst for exploration. Recognize the phase of transition you are experiencing at the current moment and begin to attempt to build sustainable, resilient methods. As you explore each one or multiple, find the variations specific to your phase of transition. Here are a few methods:

- (1) Self-care. Self-care is not a new concept in higher education. Many people who experience change and transition may perceive taking time for themselves as a selfish act. But taking care of yourself on a regular basis can build mental, emotional, and/or physical capacity to give to others. Self-care can include writing in a journal, seeing a therapist, physical activity, meditation, sleep, etc.

- (2) Set attainable goals. For some of us, getting any “win” in the personal and/or professional arenas of our lives can add to our feeling of confidence and competence. Feeling knowledgeable about a job, finding a good route to work, or only pressing the snooze alarm once a week can be a satisfying motivator to set more challenging goals.
- (3) Connect with others. While situations and time zones differ, having a conversation with another person or group of people who have gone through similar change can be exactly what you may need. Whether you join a young professionals’ network in your town, the PTA, or a community running club, just find others who can provide a different perspective, which could be the advice you need.

Change is constant and transition is a process. Finding resiliency methods to help guide your transition is a necessity as you continue to experience change. Identifying resiliency methods to work for you is crucial prior to change occurring. While the methods may shift, having a routine, a person to talk to, and goals can often help to progress through transition easier. In the anecdote above, my questions and fears were very real. But as I spoke to my mentor she reminded me of my top value, and that this was not my first time making a move for professional and personal reasons. I took time to make meaning of the first time I made a similar transition, and I recollected the successful methods that worked for me. What will your methods be for you? Who will you call to work through your transition? How will you continue to help others when they experience change and are going through transition?

References

Bridges, W. (1991). *Managing transitions: Marking the most of change*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

The Road to Resilience. (n.d.). Retrieve September 5, 2015 from <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>