

## TEN STAGES OF CAREER TRANSITION: A FRAMEWORK FOR CLIENTS FACING CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE

This article serves as a framework for individuals facing change and transition in the workplace, and for the emotional intelligence aligned with the framework. More specifically, we are talking here about two common scenarios: (1) Clients who have been told that their future with their current organization is in doubt; or (2) Clients who, on their own, have begun to realize that their current organization may not be the right place for them to stay.

Change in the workplace is occurring more frequently than ever before due to reorganizations, mergers, acquisitions or a change of leadership. Therefore, it is not surprising that many people find themselves facing one of these two scenarios (above). In either case, employees go through a transition in which they experience an evolution of emotional stages. It is vital for clients to be aware of these stages, and to know how best to move themselves forward—often with the guidance of a coach—through each stage toward a positive resolution. The implication of each emotional stage is important to understand in order to be emotionally ready to move on through the phases. For instance, some clients may not be emotionally ready to take productive, effective action until he or she has had the time to process and work through the previous phase.

The framework introduced here is based on the Perlman/Takacs model of the 10 emotional stages of change, which incorporates the model presented by Kubler-Ross in *On Death and Dying*.

### What stage are you in NOW?

- 1. Equilibrium** You feel in sync and in alignment with personal and professional goals, and congruent with the organization's goals. Everything seems to be working. You are content and comfortable with the status quo, and the future looks bright.
- 2. Denial** (Many clients are stuck here when they begin coaching. In fact, without coaching, people can spend months or even years in denial.) Your circumstances have begun to change, but you are not cognizant of what is happening. Instead, you are devoting some energy to rationalizing away or ignoring the signs. You may be experiencing negative changes in your physical health, emotional balance, logical thinking patterns and normal behavior patterns. You are not emotionally ready to admit or acknowledge that things have turned for the worse.
- 3. Anger** When denial has begun to diminish, then the tendency is to begin to blame others. What takes place often is displaced anger, frustration, resentment or envy because of feeling out of control. Your view of reality is still distorted.
- 4. Bargaining** You are devoting energy by trying to eliminate the change, and you are using any means feasible to negotiate and get things back to the way they were. You are grasping at straws, coming up with unrealistic options in an attempt to solve the problem.



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5. **Chaos** You feel powerless and insecure, disoriented and confused. You experience a loss of energy and direction, with a shaky emotional foundation and personal meaning.
6. **Depression** You depleted all of your energy by exerting it to create and maintain defense mechanisms, and you are experiencing emotional loss over what existed before. You may be feeling self-pity, pining for the past and experiencing feelings of emptiness.
7. **Resignation** You have worked through the feelings of depression, accepted the reality of the change and no longer resist it. However, you still feel a lack of energy and are behaving passively.
8. **Openness** Having moved through depression and resignation, and now accepting the change, you are open to a new beginning and ready to deal with things. Your energy level is beginning to rise; however, you are unable to focus and move forward.
9. **Readiness** You are now willing to expend energy in exploring new opportunities. The emotional “letting go” of the past is noticeable and your energy level has increased.
10. **Re-emergence** You have fully let go of the way things used to be, both emotionally and intellectually. Your energy is now channeled in a totally positive direction. You feel optimistic and empowered. Confidence has returned. You are committed to, and excited about, moving forward. You display initiative and are taking action without prompting. A kind of rebirth has occurred.

## TEN STAGES OF CAREER TRANSITION: A FRAMEWORK FOR CLIENTS/COACHING IMPLICATIONS AND STRATEGIES

This article serves as a framework for individuals facing change and transition in the workplace, and for the emotional intelligence aligned with the framework. More specifically, we are talking here about two common scenarios: (1) Clients who have been told that their future with their current organization is in doubt; or (2) Clients who, on their own, have begun to realize that their current organization may not be the right place for them to stay.

Change in the workplace is occurring more frequently than ever before due to reorganizations, mergers, acquisitions or a change of leadership. Therefore, it is not surprising that many people find themselves facing one of these two scenarios (above). In either case, employees go through a transition in which they experience an evolution of emotional stages. It is vital for coaches to be aware of these stages, and to know how best to move their clients forward through each stage toward a positive resolution. The coach must understand the implications of each emotional stage with respect to the client's readiness to move through the various phases of a job search. For instance, a client may not be emotionally ready to take productive, effective action until he or she has had the time to process and work through the initial emotional rollercoaster discussed below.

The framework introduced here is based on the Perlman/Takacs model of the 10 emotional stages of change, which incorporates the model presented by Kubler-Ross in *On Death and Dying*.

- 1. Equilibrium** The client feels in sync and aligned with personal and professional goals, and congruent with the organization's goals. Everything seems to be working. The client is content and comfortable with the status quo, and the future looks bright.

### Coaching Implications/Strategies

The clients we are describing in this article will not be in this phase. However, from a coaching perspective, having the client reconnect with how it felt to be in equilibrium can help them in formulating their ideal vision for the future. Also, having them recognize the difference between their previous state of equilibrium and their current emotional state can help them move forward through the stages discussed below.

- 2. Denial** (Many clients are stuck here when they begin coaching. In fact, without coaching, people can spend months or even years in denial.) The client's circumstances have begun to change, but he or she is not cognizant of what is happening. Instead, the client is devoting energy to rationalizing away or ignoring the signs, and may be experiencing negative changes in their physical health, emotional balance, logical thinking patterns and normal behavior patterns. The client is not emotionally ready to admit or acknowledge that things have turned for the worse.

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### 2. Denial (continued)

#### Coaching Implications/Strategies

The client in this stage is not ready to productively move forward. Coaching must focus on having the client become aware of their state of denial and understand the emotional dynamics that caused the denial. A path leading to the awareness of the denial is helping the client to recognize the negative symptoms of denial. For instance, by engaging in a questioning process that reveals the illogical rationale that the client has presented, the coach begins to get the client to look deeper into what is going on. The goal of coaching through this stage is to get the client to recognize the reality of the change, to let go of the denial defense mechanisms and deal with the emotions (fear, uncertainty, anxiety) that prompted the denial in the first place.

3. **Anger** When denial has begun to diminish, then the tendency is for the client to begin to blame others. What takes place often is displaced anger, frustration, resentment or envy because of feeling out of control. The client's view of reality is still distorted.

#### Coaching Implications/Strategies

The coach must make the client aware of the negative behaviors and displaced anger, and empathize with the underlying feelings. The coach must help the client work through the anger and re-channel the energy in a more positive direction. During this stage, clients would be doing a disservice to themselves to network and market themselves.

4. **Bargaining** The client is devoting energy by trying to eliminate the change, and is using any means feasible to negotiate and get things back to the way they were. He or she is grasping at straws, coming up with unrealistic options in an attempt to solve the problem.

#### Coaching Implications/Strategies

The coach must steer the client towards clearly understanding what is realistic and feasible.

5. **Chaos** The client feels powerless and insecure, disoriented and confused. He or she experiences a loss of energy and direction, with no sense of grounding or personal meaning.

#### Coaching Implications/Strategies

The coach needs to be supportive, empathetic and give the client full permission to experience what he or she is feeling—and acknowledge that these feelings are normal. The coach needs to convey that this phase is temporary and part of the process in moving forward.

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**6. Depression** The client has depleted all of their energy by exerting it to create and maintain defense mechanisms, and is now experiencing the pain of loss over what existed before. The client may be feeling self-pity, pining for the past and experiencing feelings of emptiness.

### Coaching Implications/Strategies

The coach must continue to be supportive, empathetic and give the client full permission to experience what he or she is feeling—and acknowledge that these feelings are normal. The coach must be very patient and allow the client to move at their own pace, sorting through their feelings, reflecting and taking time to do some soul searching. Journaling may be a useful tool at this stage.

**7. Resignation** The client has slowly worked through the feelings of depression, accepted the reality of the change and no longer resists it. However, the client is still experiencing a lack of energy and behaving passively.

### Coaching Implications/Strategies

The coach needs to recognize that the client is now able to acknowledge their reality and discuss and analyze its implications, but cannot be expected to be motivated to work toward future goals yet. The coach can help the client reframe the change into something positive.

**8. Openness** Having moved through depression and resignation, and now accepting the change, the client is open to a new beginning and ready to deal with things. Their energy level is beginning to rise; however, the client is unable to view the change and the future with enthusiasm.

### Coaching Implications/Strategies

The client is now open to engaging in a forward-looking dialogue. With clear direction, the client may be able to begin to take some action. But the coach still must display patience, for the client may still not be fully removed or recovered from the previous emotional stages. At this stage, the client may be receptive and ready to proceed with thinking about his or her positive accomplishments, strengths and career goals that will form the basis of an effective resume.

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**9. Readiness** The client is now willing to expend energy in exploring new opportunities. The emotional “letting go” of the past is noticeable, and the client’s energy level has increased.

### **Coaching Implications/Strategies**

The client is now ready to do goal setting and action planning. The client may require extra amounts of guidance, support and encouragement from the coach. The client is still not likely to be proactive, but is capable of moving forward. At this stage, the client is likely to be ready to conduct productive informational meetings.

**10. Re-emergence** The client has fully let go of the way things used to be, both emotionally and intellectually. Their energy is now channeled in a totally positive direction. He or she feels optimistic and empowered, and confidence has returned. The client is committed to, and excited about, moving forward. The client displays initiative and takes action without prompting. A kind of rebirth has occurred.

**Coaching Implications/Strategies** Full-fledged goal and action-oriented coaching can now occur. With the client once again fully functioning, clearly thinking and energized, the coach is there to serve the client in effectively identifying and achieving the client’s new vision of the future. The client is now ready to effectively interview and make wise decisions with full awareness and clarity of their own personal purpose, values and preferences that will lead them to a new equilibrium.

**Reference** Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On Death and Dying*. New York: Macmillan, 260 pages.

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