

# Managing A Leadership Transition

**A CHECK LIST  
OF KEY  
INTERVENTIONS  
FOR TRANSITION  
CONSULTANTS  
AND INTERIM  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTORS**



706 Mission St. – 5th Floor  
San Francisco CA 94103-  
3113  
415.541.9000 ph  
415.541.7708 fx

email [info@compasspoint.org](mailto:info@compasspoint.org)  
web [www.compasspoint.org](http://www.compasspoint.org)



## Introduction

This checklist is meant as a guide for the strategies of Interim Executive Directors and Transition Consultants who are working with clients of the *Executive Transitions* program at CompassPoint Nonprofit Services. It was developed by a committee of veteran executives and consultants who had worked with *Executive Transitions* clients over the first two years of the program.

A major strategic concept underpins the interventions listed:

1. The chances for a successful tenure by an agency's new CEO are optimized if careful attention is given both to "change" techniques (candidate recruitment and proper departure rituals for the resigning ED, for example) and to techniques for helping all stakeholders through the psychological "transition" that lags behind all objective change events. Skipping over key change steps or transition steps can lead to serious difficulties for the agency's enterprises and its newly hired executive director.
2. Using the language of William Bridges, there are three major phases to an executive transition: ending, neutral zone, and beginning. There are interventions specific to managing each phase.

The suggested interventions are organized with these concepts in mind. They are split out by transition phase, and within each phase there are interventions related to change activities and to transition needs.

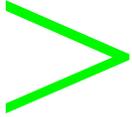
It should be noted that the phases are overlapping as a change unfolds; the three phases do not have discrete endings. For instance, transition activities relating to the departure of the former executive can be still be occurring after the beginning of the new executive.



## Prologue

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

- \_\_\_ Formation by the Board of the Transition Committee  
to oversee all change and transition work
- \_\_\_ Designation of staff transition roles that ensure full staff  
input and involvement in the change and transition process
- \_\_\_ Recruitment of Interim ED, if needed, from  
among current managers or from among external candidates
- \_\_\_ Clarification of division of roles between Interim ED and Transition  
Consultant



## Phase I

### A GOOD ENDING WITH THE DEPARTING ED

#### *CHANGE ACTIVITIES*

*Events, outcome focused, relatively quick*

- Setting a departure date for the executive director (ED)
- Defining ED's role in the transition activities, e.g., Transition Committee membership
- Establishing the ED's transition plan, e.g., securing a grant for next fiscal year
- Conducting goodbye ceremonies
- Defining the post-departure role of the ED vis a vis the agency and its Board

#### *TRANSITION ACTIVITIES*

*Psychological, process-based, gradual. Attending to the inner reorientation process that individuals and teams go through when some change requires them to stop doing things the way they used to and start doing them differently*

- Establishing regular communications between consultant and the ED
- Helping the departing ED focus on new beginnings in his or her career
- Attending to any barriers to ED's letting go
- Acknowledging the legacy & achievements of the departing ED
- Identifying the skills appreciated in the departing ED; acknowledging the losses



## Phase II

### THE NEUTRAL ZONE

#### *CHANGE ACTIVITIES*

- \_\_\_ Perform organizational audit to identify:
  - Strengths & weaknesses
  - Opportunities & threats
  - Priority challenges & opportunities
  - Adequacy of Board oversight & governance
  - Agency work culture
  - Agency life cycle
  - Change goals for interim ED
- \_\_\_ Create Board development plan (*implementation may be delayed until after new ED starts*)
- \_\_\_ Attend to interim organizational upgrades
- \_\_\_ Prepare for ED recruitment
  - Update the agency vision statement
  - Identify the major strategic questions for the agency
  - Draft profile of desired chief executive
- \_\_\_ Conduct search for next ED

#### *TRANSITION ACTIVITIES*

- \_\_\_ Acknowledge the instability & chaos inherent in transitions; *create temporary structures and solutions* (Bridges)
- \_\_\_ Engage the Board and the staff management group in developing the *Transition Management Plan* (Bridges)
- \_\_\_ Closely engage the staff management group in setting interim procedures & rules, e.g. decision making
- \_\_\_ Communicate profusely with all key stakeholders– staff, funders, volunteers, clients (*2 C's, 4 P's – Bridges*)

\_\_\_ Tap into the creative side of the neutral zone (*Bridges*)

Step back, take stock, challenge accepted answers

Search situation for clues and messages

Solicit new ideas from everyone

Encourage experiments

If the future doesn't exist, create it

\_\_\_ Facilitate movement to the new beginning

Permit & facilitate grieving the losses

Deal with any guilt, resentment, or anxiety that emerge as a result of the changes

Focus on agency mission & future vision



## Phase III

### THE NEW BEGINNING WITH THE NEW ED

#### *CHANGE ACTIVITIES*

- Conduct orientation & welcoming ceremonies
- Establish Board support & feedback
- Negotiate initial performance goals
- Agree on a performance evaluation protocol
- Create ongoing Board/ED communication patterns
- Plan for ED skill development, especially for first-time ED
  - Set professional development goals
  - Connect with professional support mechanisms
  - Peer group/Coach/mentor
- Celebrate the successful transition; acknowledge accomplishments of all parties
- Facilitate the new beginning* (Bridges): Develop the strategies for implementing changes necessary for achieving the updated vision & goals
- Become the facilitative leader of the staff management team
- Address challenges identified in organizational audit
- Understand agency work culture and be strategic in making any needed changes
- Connect with stakeholders
- Engage the previous ED and the interim ED as appropriate
- Work with Board to recruit fresh board members

#### *TRANSITION ACTIVITIES*

- Facilitate Board discussion of how it wants to productively team up with the new ED
- Communicate profusely – 2 C's & 4 P's (Bridges)
- Seek input & feedback on changes as they are planned & implemented
- Negotiate on new rules, procedures, boundaries

\_\_\_ Acknowledge ongoing changes & the time and process needed for the concomitant transitions

\_\_\_ *Make the organization more transition worthy* (Bridges)