

Managing the Neutral Zone

The limbo between our old way of doing things and the new way we're seeking is very challenging. Our previous clarity breaks down once we begin to move past where we were but before we arrive at the new state, and nothing is certain.

“It's not so much that we're afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place in between that we fear. It's like being between trapezes. It's Linus when his blanket is in the dryer. There's nothing to hold on to.”

— MARILYN FERGUSON, AMERICAN FUTURIST

In this state, our anxiety rises, our productivity falls, and our old patterns and fears re-emerge stronger than ever. But there are ways to manage this state until we begin to solidify the change we're seeking. ⁱ

Normalize it

Realizing that this neutral zone is not a wasted time of meaningless waiting, that it has a very real purpose, can help manage this period. This is when we re-orient and re-define, when we shed the old ways of doing things and germinate the new ways. Take stock of what has worked, what feeds you the most, what you need while you're in this in-between place. ***Give yourself more time for reflection while you're in this space, it is fertile time.***

What is it about this stage that is provoking the most anxiety for you? Naming how you feel while you're in this neutral zone helps surface the underlying emotions so that you can acknowledge them and soften around them.

What currently brings you solace and peace in your day-to-day life? How can you do more of it?

Who or what can you connect with to help you stay grounded? Friends, family, external resources, spiritual or personal practices?

Redefine it

Reframing how you see this stage of transition can help you manage it more successfully. See it as a chance to do something new and interesting, a place of opportunity and creation. The chaos generated by the neutral zone is also a time when the restraints we place on our creativity and innovation are weaker. Question your assumptions. Give yourself permission to try something totally different. Experiment. Brainstorm. Embrace it.

How can I make this interim between the old and the new not only bearable but a time when things are enhanced in my life?

What feeds my creativity? What people, activities, or places spark my creative juices? How can I spend more time there right now?

What would I let go of completely, if I could?

What would I embrace more fully if things were different in my life?

¹ Adapted from Bridges, W. (2003). *Managing transitions: making the most of change*, 2nd edition. Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press.