

Transitions large and small

I am writing this as autumn approaches. You will probably be reading it in mid-winter.

I'm writing this the day after I stood down as chair of READ International and passed the baton to a new leader.

I'm writing this just days after the closing date for nominations to the International Association of Facilitators board. The election procedure will have run its course by the time you read this and new board members will be gathering for the one of the 11 board meetings each year which is face-to-face.

Transitions happen everywhere, all over the place, all the time.

OK, I know that's nothing new. So what? The 'so what' is that by our intentions, clarity and skill we can influence what happens when these transitions come our way so be less subject to the tidal flows that surround.

Board transitions are many and various – a change of trustees, a change of strategic direction, a change of supporters, a change of office location. Here are some things to keep in mind which will increase the chances of your being able to manage the transition to take you safely in the direction that you want to go.

- Know that transitions are unsettling, difficult and precarious and can keep you awake at night; when that happens, however bumpy it is, know that it will not go on forever.
- This is a time for you and fellow trustees to focus your attention and the attention of others on the vision. It's a bit like looking to the horizon when you are on a ship in stormy seas; this will steady you and will keep you heading straight even when you're blown off course.

- Know that unexpected things, good news and bad news, are going to cross your path. You don't know what they will be but knowing that they will come, will help prepare you to react quickly.
- Give even more attention to being transparent than you would normally do. Change provokes fears so make sure people are kept informed – and know too that people are distracted by their fears so you will have to say things several times. Demonstrate your transparency by your words and actions and others may follow your good example.
- Be consistently well organised and responsive. Emails and calls unanswered for too long will allow more fears to proliferate.

For me now is a transition. Having written for every issue of *Governance* (other than the very first) and having started the Under the Boardtalk series six years ago, this is my last regular contribution. A few months ago it felt curiously difficult to decide to let go. Now that the transition is made, I am already seeing new possibilities emerge. Move the stone and new grass will grow.

It's reassuring to know that while transitions surround us, some things remain curiously resistant to change. The discomfort of the 'itchy toes' I wrote about in 2007, are still there in many meetings. The Drifters' 1964 classic 'Under the Boardwalk', the inspiration for this series, is still with us and so is the rich source of fascination and learning from the 'board talk' that goes on under the table. ●

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