

Top 10 Transition Tips

Written by *Jesse Criss*

Edited by Michelle Murray-Schlitt

INTRO

Today I want to talk about **TRANSITIONS** in Ministry. This is that season when Pastor come and go from churches, this can happen for a variety of reasons.

- Stepping into a new role at a new church (upward movement)
- Taking on more responsibilities within the system you're in
- Leading a Church Plant
- Disagreement with Leadership
- Burnout
- Unresolved Conflict
- Split within the Church/Denomination

Regardless where you are on that spectrum the biggest challenge to any **TRANSITION** is **RELATIONSHIPS**. Because at the end of the day we are in the **RELATIONSHIPS** business.

- We are seeking to build relationship with people every day
- We are seeking to help people build a relationship with Jesus
- Our work world and friend world are always intertwined **BECAUSE** we have relationships, so when we leave a church position we **DISRUPT** and **CHANGE** those dynamics and it's **NOT ALWAYS EASY**.

I speak from experience. Personally, in the last 17 years I have made 5 transitions (2 as a part-timer 3 as a full-timer) and 3 of the 5 were difficult and tricky transitions. However, because of this experience I have learned a few things and would like to give you my

TOP 10: TRANSITION TIPS

#1 - Leave Well

To the best of your ability leave well. Trust me I know that is easier said than done some times but there are still many factors that are within **YOUR ABILITY** to control:

- You control how you communicate
- You control what your attitude will be

I have always done whatever I can to leave a church well because if I did my job right I invested time, energy, and resources into the church/ministry/program. In a simple transition, this is a given, however in more difficult transitions it can be tempting to just throw up your hands and walk away. But that is not what God has called you to do.

#2 - Create a Transition Plan

Sit down with your Senior Leadership Team and create a Transition Plan in writing. This helps both parties know all the details, ground rules and can allow for the awkward questions to get out of the way early. Consider the following things...

- Compensation package
- Unused Time Off
- Transition Announcement schedule (When will you tell people)
- What will be communicated (Specific details)
- Officially setting a last day
- What you are willing to do to help the transition
- What you need from them to help the transition

#3 - Put your house in order

This is a BIG one for me... you have an obligation and a responsibility to put your HOUSE IN ORDER. Each and everyone of us has...

- Unresolved meetings
- Conflicts to deal with
- Leaders to coach and mentor
- Files to be organized
- Rooms to clean
- Supplies to be labeled

Do yourself and the people that will come after you a favour and CLEAN HOUSE. Chances are that the next person doesn't understand you file everything on the computer by famous Christian artists. However even more importantly than that, don't leave your successors to clean up your leadership messes. They have gotten this way because YOU chose not to resolve that conflict or confront that issue. I have take over for several people that have left things in total limbo and its is INFINITELY more work.

BONUS: The odds are high it will actually be one of your leader friends who has to step in for a short time, so do them a solid and CLEAN HOUSE

#4 - Two Months is ideal

For your Transition Plan you need to know when you are leaving. You can't stay too long because no matter how amazing you are, your mind and focuses will start to shift to your next opportunity. However, if you leave too quickly you risk damaging the relationships you have created and potentially spoiling the well for the next person/ministry.

- Gives leadership time to get ready
- Gives you time to say goodbye to kids and leaders
- Gives the church time to celebrate/adjust
- You have time to put your HOUSE IN ORDER

However, let me make this clear, 2 months is the IDEAL not the rule. If your transition is because of unhealthy, toxic work environment that is affecting you or your family personally or physically, this rule doesn't apply.

#5- Basic Ministry Plan

Transitions can and do take time, and that is true for you leaving a church but also for your church bringing someone new in. Because of that the vast majority of the time an

INTERIM Leader/Group is set-up to take care of things. This group is often made up of Leaders, Parents, Elders, or other staff members. However, in many cases this interim leader/group will not know your team or kids like you do.

In all 5 of my transitions I have left a 3 Month Ministry Plan, putting together some of the following...

- Simple Calendar
- Teaching Series or Curriculum they can follow.
- Contact list (more on that in a minute)
- Report on how the last year went.

All of these things help reinforce RULE #1, LEAVE WELL. However, be open handed about the whole thing. They may CHOOSE not to follow your guide or plan and that is THEIR choice. But to the best of your ability you have tried to LEAVE WELL and have provided the tools for your successors to transition more easily as well.

#6 - Database, Database, Database

This is the DIGITAL equivalent to RULE #2, Put Your House in Order. You need to have a clean Database for the next person to follow. I can not stress the importance of keeping a Database enough, if you don't have one stay tuned to future videos coming soon. For the moment let me give you my quick thoughts on WHY a Database is critical in Ministry.

God has entrusted a flock of his sheep to you and you have a responsibility to KNOW YOUR SHEEP. That's why a Database is important, it helps you know who your students are, when they missed youth and how to contact them. However more importantly it communicates to your students that YOU CARE, YOU KNOW THEIR NAME and THAT THEY ARE MISSED. Please create a Database that you, leaders, and future people can access.

The rule for transition is all about a CLEAN Database. One of the challenges here is that's EASY to pad your Database to increase your potential number count (you all know this happens). However, I would advocate especially in transition that if you haven't seen a kid in 6 months or more they either need to be deleted or put into an INACTIVE category. Regardless of how you organize it you need to clean your system so the person coming in knows how to contact their flock and can continue to minister and chase after the kids you know and love.

#7 - Team Breakdown

You not only want to make sure you have all the contact info for your students databased but you also need to make sure you have a similar Database for leaders as well. Often our leaders are also our friends and are sometimes even our social circle. That can mean that we take for granted how to contact and get a hold of each other. When passing on a leadership team to a new person you need to pass off not just the contact info but also...

- Address

- Email
- Phone/Cell Number
- Spiritual Gifts
- Roles/Job Description

I would also add that I have appreciated knowing a few things about them as leaders as well

- Passion
- Strengths/Weaknesses

You're not writing a resume and some of this doesn't need to be in-depth details but this kind of information is good to pass on and sometimes can be vital. Especially if you have had to go through some form of church discipline with them. Some information needs to be passed on for the safety of the group and unfortunately when you think it should get passed on it often doesn't.

#8- Feelings matter

During this season you are going to have LOTS and LOTS of feelings and so will the people around you. Sadness and loss, no matter how good the transitional situation is, will be the dominant ones. You need to feel them rather than suppress them. I think as Pastors we often want to put on a brave face for the world around us. Most of the time it's probably okay but this is one of those moments people need to see that you are HUMAN. Because the alternative is worse... especially in a NEGATIVE or difficult transition.

A number of years ago in one of my transitions I bottled up my feelings instead dealing with them or at least letting myself feel them. I told everyone I was okay, put on the brave face and even did some transitional work but it was all a mask.

Then I had a day where I broke and SCREAMED a SCREAM that I didn't know I had. In that moment I knew what had happened and I broke down and cried out to God. I was then able to take the mask off, share my feelings and I started to talk about it... but HEALING TOOK TIME (Another story for another day)

#9 - Heads Up Sheet

I live in a Townhouse and when you buy a property you get a copy of the "Strata Council Minutes." These are often a collection of 1-2 page documents that tell you all the things going on in the complex. Potential issues, grumpy neighbours, fines handout, and what the maintenance schedule looks like.

- Let's say you follow Rule #2, Create a Transition Plan and #3, Put your house in order then a sheet like this is a summary of what is contained inside
- But if you don't follow those rules this is your chance and I would say obligation to put together a 1-2 sheet document outline all the things going on:
 - Meeting plans with kids
 - Leadership updates

- Pending Elders/Board decisions
- Typical schedule

By doing this you are setting up the next person with the best current info about the group.

#10 - 1% Rule

Finally, the last and hardest tip of all. You can choose to dismiss everything else I have said but you CAN NOT get around this one. Like I said at the start in 17 years I have made 5 transitions and this rule comes from my personal experience as a HIGHLY relational human that after the first 3-6months and especially after 1 year after your departure your contact with your last group will be down to 1%... basically the core of the core kids... AND THAT IS okay.

- We are in the relationship business but in most groups, you have a team of people and in most transitions those teams don't change a ton just the person at the top... you and I. So many kids will still have their connections with their leaders.
- Furthermore, it is important that they connect with the new person
 - My boss says that "students need scaffolding in their lives not a single ladder" and he is 100% right
 - You can not be their only person forever
 - You will not be their sole teacher forever

But there will always be the 1%, often these are the kids that connected with you the most, Students drift for all kinds of reasons, business, travel, growing up, this is inevitable!

CONCLUSION

God is putting you in transition to look FOWARD to a new group of students or adults. That is crazy exciting and should be celebrated. We believe that God is in control regardless of the situation around why your in transition. The challenge for you and me is to always TRANSITION WELL. By doing things like; building a transition plan, refining your database, and cleaning that youth closet you can barely close the door on. You are setting up the next person not only for success but also demonstrating that you trust that God will care of them the same way HE TAKING CARE OF YOU. Remember you have poured your heart and soul into this ministry and God is calling you to LEAVE WELL.