

The Neutral Zone:

Stepping Away from the Past and Into the Uncertain Future

By Darlene Chambers, Ph.D

“The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible.”

Managing the Neutral Zone

Even rapid fire change has increased its speed beyond prediction with the newest of tsunamis caused by the faltering economy's quake and eruptions. Managers are now caught in the crossfire of maintaining strategic direction and providing supportive leadership guidance while trying to stop the financial hemorrhaging. This no man's land was called the "neutral zone" by William Bridges in his seminal book, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. It is the space between what we were used to and what the future will bring.

Managers who were taught and trained to decidedly fix and do are stumbling in an environment which on one hand is requiring quick fixes to improve the cash flow and on the other will be best navigated by taking time to form a guiding coalition to innovate new choices.

The act of choosing starts the ball of action rolling. Managers can help everyone understand the need to choose their attitude when looking at the upheavals as threatening or promising. One of the most difficult aspects of this is that most don't understand what to keep and what to choose from refusing to consider opportunities out of fear of the unknown. Because the transition



will not be a dash from one side of the street to the other, the manager can be a key player in helping stay the course.

The neutral zone has been compared to jumping off a diving board filled with uncertainty into a future with no boundaries. Managing the journey will be determined by how we singularly and collectively choose to survive and thrive in the gap between the old and the new- chaos, confusion, and all.

Seven Tips for Navigating the Neutral Zone

1. Form a sufficiently powerful guiding coalition to create, communicate, and implement the change vision.
2. Create temporary business processes that help to smooth from the old to the new and

provide guiding rules and procedures that do not impede but support people's work.

3. Visit organizational structure to fit current reality.
4. Set short range goals for people and establish more frequent check points.
5. Make sure everyone has a part to play in making the new reality.
6. Find out what staff need to learn to function successfully- offer training.
7. Prepare to anchor changes firmly in the organization's corporate culture.

Darlene Chambers, Ph.D, Vice President of VistaGroup, specializes in performance management.

Arthur C. Clarke,

“Technology and the Future”
(Clarke's second law) English
physicist & science fiction author
(1917 -)



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VistaGroup is committed to helping organizations align people and processes with the intent of building competitive advantage. Let us help you begin today - *moving ideas to action.*

Book Pick of the Month



A Sense of Urgency by John P. Kotter
Harvard Business Press, 2008

The neutral zone can be navigated with the constant "sense of urgency" brought forth in Kotter's new book. Kotter's theme on change framework articulated in *Leading Change*, readdressed in his second book, *the Heart of Change*, and portrayed in his most recent fable, *Our Iceberg is Melting*.

His real-time stories keep his urgent message from being a tired worn-out retreat. They instructively inspire all to bring in outside perspectives, choose to motivate each day, find opportunities among the crises, and deal with those who always look for reasons to return to the old ways.

VistaView

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2748 Centennial Road
Toledo, OH 43617

866.754.8380
VistaGroupLLC.com

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"Moving Ideas to Action"
Webinar

Facilitated by:

Mark Frasco
President
&

Darlene Chambers, PhD
Vice President

on

Wednesday, April 22nd
from Noon - 1:00pm
eastern

moving ideas to action