Ed Batista

Executive Coaching & Change Management

SELF-COACHING GUIDE #4: CHANGE

A compilation of posts from www.edbatista.com

More at resources.edbatista.com

A Note on Links: In digital copies of this document, all the links underlined in blue are live, and clicking them while holding down the CTRL key should launch your browser. If you're holding a printed version or if your browser doesn't launch, please visit www.edbatista.com.

1. William Bridges on Transitions

Almost everyone I encounter in my work as a coach has recently been through a transition, is going through a transition, is on the verge of a transition, or senses a transition on the horizon. (And **all** of the students I work with at Stanford fall into one of these categories.) So it's no surprise that my copy of William Bridges' [Transitions](#) is well-thumbed and richly annotated.
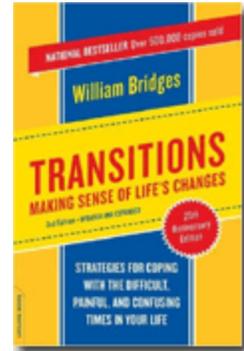
I've learned many things from Bridges, but two fundamental concepts have been most valuable. First is the distinction between *transition* and *change*. From the preface of the book's second edition (2004):

> Our society confuses them constantly, leading us to imagine that *transition* is just another word for *change*. But it isn't. *Change* is your move to a new city or your shift to a new job. It is the birth of your new baby or the death of your father. It is the switch from the old health plan at work to the new one, or the replacement of your manager by a new one, or it is the acquisition that your company just made.
>
> In other words, *change* is situational. *Transition*, on the other hand, is psychological. It is not those events, but rather the inner reorientation and self-redefinition that you have to go through in order to incorporate any of those changes into your life. Without a transition, a change is just a rearrangement of the furniture. Unless transition happens, the change won't work, because it doesn't "take." Whatever word we use, our society talks a lot about change, but it seldom deals with transition. Unfortunately for us, it is the transition that blind-sides us and is often the source of our troubles...
>
> One of the most important differences between a change and a transition is that changes are driven to reach a goal, but transitions start with letting go of what no longer fits or is adequate to the life stage you are in. You need to figure out what exactly that no-longer-appropriate thing is... [But w]hatever it is, it is *internal*. Although it might be true that you emerge from a time of transition with the clear sense that it is time for you to end a relationship or leave a job, that simply represents the *change* that your *transition* has prepared you to make. The transition itself begins with letting go of something that you have believed or assumed, some way you've always been or seen yourself, some outlook on the world or attitude toward others.

And second is the nature of transition, the central theme of Bridges' work:

> All transitions are composed of (1) an ending, (2) a neutral zone, and (3) a new beginning...
>
> Every transition begins with an ending. We have to let go of the old thing

before we can pick up with the new one--not just outwardly, but inwardly, where we keep our connections to people and places that act as definitions of who we are...

First there is an ending, *then* a beginning, and important empty or fallow time in between. That is the order of things in nature...

Bridges observes that in our culture we not only fail to acknowledge endings but also find ourselves at loose ends and stressed out in the fallow period that precedes the actual beginning. He strongly encourages us to take a different approach:

One of the difficulties of being in transition in the modern world is that we have lost our appreciation for this gap in the continuity of existence. For us, "emptiness" represents only the absence of something. So when what's missing is something as important as relatedness and purpose and reality, we try to find ways of replacing those missing elements as quickly as possible...

You should not feel defensive about this apparently unproductive time-out during your transition points, for the neutral zone is meant to be a moratorium from the conventional activity of your everyday existence...

There are three main reasons for the emptiness between the old life and the new. First, the process of transformation is essentially a death and rebirth process rather than one of mechanical modification...

The second reason for the gap between the old life and the new is that the process of disintegration and reintegration is the source of renewal...

The last reason for the emptiness between the stages of the life journey is the perspective it provides on the stages themselves... The neutral zone provides access to an angle of vision on life that one can get nowhere else. And it is a succession of such views over a lifetime that produces wisdom.

Bridges' emphasis on the fallow period and its importance, despite (or because of) the stress it causes, reminds me of Kurt Lewin's model of change, which suggests that we must "unfreeze" before any change can take place (and that we "refreeze" afterwards.) As you might imagine, "unfreezing" is hardly a stress-free process; as Edgar Schein has noted while elaborating on Lewin's work,

[H]uman change, whether at the individual or group level...[involves] **painful unlearning**...and **difficult relearning** as one cognitively [attempts] to restructure one's thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes. [Emphasis mine]

These ideas are of more than theoretical interest to me, not only because of my work as a coach and change management consultant, but also because of two important transitions I've experienced in recent years: I launched my coaching practice in

2006, and the following year I turned 40 and suffered the loss of several people in my life. In both cases I realized belatedly that I hadn't fully acknowledged what was ending--a 15-year career in organizational management on the one hand, and the illusion that mortality was an abstract concept on the other--and it was important to take some time to reflect on what I had accomplished (and failed to accomplish) both professionally and personally, to signify and recognize an end to one phase of my career and to one chapter in my life.

Acknowledging those endings also helped me to understand and work through the fallow periods that corresponded to the transitions I was experiencing and prepared me to step into the new beginnings that followed. It hasn't been a seamless process, by any means. There are moments when I miss management, and I wonder how I'll fulfill my desire to lead while serving as a coach and consultant. And there are certainly times when I refuse to admit that I'm probably in the second half of my life, with fewer years ahead of me than behind me. But it would have been a hell of a lot more difficult without the benefit of what I've learned from thinkers like Bridges, Lewin and Schein, and for that, I'm most grateful.

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2008/08/transitions.html

2. Do You Have to Leap...Or Can You Grow?

Every few months I have an intense, wide-ranging phone conversation with my friend [Robert Bengston](). Our most recent talk focused on how you move from one stage of your life to the next. And the way we framed the issue was by asking: *Do you have to take a leap, or can you grow there?*

I've taken several big professional leaps in my life. When I decided to leave journalism so that I could work directly to help people who were homeless instead of just writing about their plight, I sold my car to finance a job search in the nonprofit sector. Seven years later, when I was ready to move on from social services in order to focus on how technology could transform nonprofit management, I quit my job and trained my replacement while I was waiting to learn if I would be accepted into business school. And seven years after that--apparently I run on [seven-year cycles](){}--I resigned another leadership position to launch my executive coaching and consulting practice.

In each of these cases I felt that I *had* to take a leap in order to get where I wanted to be. I'd climbed a ladder with some success and had done some very rewarding work along the way, but that ladder was no longer headed in the direction I wanted to travel. And so I just...jumped off.

I had support from plenty of sources--most of all from a wife who believed in me--and I'm well aware of the many advantages I enjoy that allowed me to leap knowing that even a crash-landing would be somewhat cushioned. But I was still scared, and I still lost sleep wondering if I'd made a rash decision.

And yet in every case the leap paid off. After selling my car I landed a job working for a woman who would be the best mentor I ever had. After leaving social services I was accepted into Stanford (and although I explored a lot of different career paths during my two years there, after graduation I became the first Executive Director of

the [Nonprofit Technology Network](#), a job that could have been scripted from one of my b-school admission essays.) And after leaving management to launch my coaching practice, I had the opportunity to return to Stanford as a Leadership Coach, and the past three years there have been the most gratifying experience in my professional life.

But despite these positive outcomes, I've also realized (with Robert's help) that I'm done leaping. I've found my calling--my *vocation*--in coaching over these last three years, and with that knowledge has come a sense that I'm no longer climbing a ladder; instead, I'm *growing*. I'm certainly not free from [status anxiety](#), but I know that there's no relief to be found on a higher rung--or on another ladder, for that matter. Wherever my life is headed over the long run, I now feel that I can *grow* there.

For me that means: 1) people who come into my life on a regular basis--weekly, at times--who share my values and my passions and who expand my professional universe; 2) the knowledge that every day I'm doing work that brings out my best self--not every minute of the day, by any means, but enough that I'm wondering if [10,000 hours](#) is within reach; and 3) the awareness that my personal and professional development are intertwined--to develop as a coach, I have to continue to develop as a person.

So where are you going? And do you have to leap...or can you grow?

Photo of Martin Puryear's "Ladder for Booker T." by [p a h](#). Photo of dahlias by [zedzap](#). Yay Flickr and Creative Commons.

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2009/04/leap.html

3. Peter Drucker on Managing Oneself

I never met Peter Drucker, never even heard him speak, but I'm truly going to miss him. He made a big difference in my life over the past decade. In the March-April 1999 issue of the *Harvard Business Review*, Drucker published an article entitled "Managing Oneself" (reprinted in January 2005) that I've read at least once a year ever since. It's only 10 pages or so, and I encourage you to buy a copy and read the whole thing--best $7 and 15 minutes you'll ever spend--but here are the passages that have had the greatest impact on me:
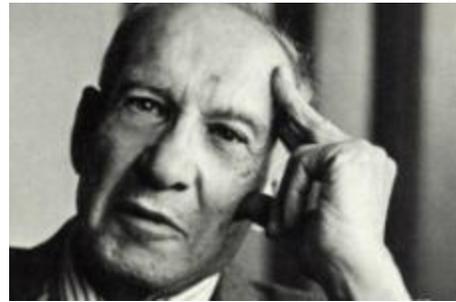
On Excellence

> One should waste as little effort as possible on improving areas of low competence. It takes far more energy and work to improve from incompetence to mediocrity than it takes to improve from first-rate performance to excellence. And yet most people--especially most teachers and most organizations--concentrate on making incompetent performers into mediocre ones. Energy, resources, and time should go instead into making a competent person into a star performer.

On Careers

> [M]ost people, especially highly gifted people, do not really know where they belong until they are well past their mid-twenties. By that time, however, they should know the answers to the three questions: What are my strengths? How do I perform? and, What are my values? And then they can and should decide where they belong.

> Or rather, they should be able to decide where they do *not* belong...

> Equally important, knowing the answers to these questions enables a person to say to an opportunity, an offer, or an assignment, "Yes, I will do that. But this is the way I should be doing it. This is the way it should be structured. This is the way the relationships should be. These are the kind of results you should expect from me, and in this time frame, because this is who I am."

> Successful careers are not planned. They develop when people are prepared for opportunities because they know their strengths, their method of work, and their values.

On Planning

> A plan can usually cover no more than 18 months and still be reasonably clear and specific. So the question in most cases should be, Where and how can I achieve results that will make a difference within the next year and a half?

The answer must balance several things. First, the results should be hard to achieve--they should require "stretching," to use the current buzzword. But also, they should be within reach. To aim at results that cannot be achieved--or that can be only under the most unlikely circumstances--is not being ambitious, it is being foolish. Second, the results should be meaningful. They should make a difference. Finally, results should be visible and, if at all possible, measurable. From this will come a course of action: what to do, where and how to start, and what goals and deadlines to set.

On Second Careers

We hear a great deal of talk about the midlife crisis of the executive. It is mostly boredom. At 45, most executives have reached the peak of their business careers, and they know it. After 20 years of doing very much the same kind of work, they are very good at their jobs. But they are not learning or contributing or deriving challenge and satisfaction from the job... That is why managing oneself increasingly leads one to begin a second career [typically by moving from one kind of organization to another; by developing a parallel career, often in a nonprofit; or by starting a new venture, again often a nonprofit]...

No one can expect to live very long without experiencing a serious setback in his or her life or work... At such times, a second major interest--not just a hobby--may make all the difference...

In a knowledge society...we expect everybody to be a success. This is clearly an impossibility. For a great many people, there is at best an absence of failure. Wherever there is success, there has to be failure. And then it is vitally important for the individual, and equally for the individual's family, to have an area in which he or she can contribute, make a difference, and be *somebody*. That means finding a second area--whether in a second career, a parallel career, or a social venture--that offers an opportunity for being a leader, for being respected, for being a success.

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2005/11/peter_drucker_o.html

4. The Dip: Seth Godin on Strategic Quitting

From Seth Godin's The Dip:

> Strategic quitting is the secret of successful organizations. Reactive quitting and serial quitting are the bane of those that strive (and fail) to get what they want. And most people do just that. They quit when it's painful and stick when they can't be bothered to quit...
>
> Strategic quitting is a conscious decision you make based on the choices available to you. If you realize you're at a dead end compared with what you could be investing in, quitting is not only a reasonable choice, it's a smart one...
>
> Coping is what people do when they try to muddle through... The problem with coping is that it never leads to exceptional performance... All coping does is waste your time and misdirect your energy. If the best you can do is cope, you're better off quitting. Quitting is better than coping because quitting frees you up to excel at something else...
>
> *Quit the wrong stuff. Stick with the right stuff. Have the guts to do one or the other.*

In my experience most of us are overcommitted, spreading ourselves too thin, and failing to deliver excellence where it really counts. We're coping, when we should be quitting. I hear an echo of Peter Drucker in Godin's message:

One should waste as little effort as possible on improving areas of low competence. It takes far more energy and work to improve from incompetence to mediocrity than it takes to improve from first-rate performance to excellence.

The implicit corollary to Drucker's message (which Godin picks up and makes explicit) is that **only excellence matters**. Improving from incompetence to mediocrity is worse than useless, because time and effort expended in those areas are being stolen from areas where excellence is within our grasp.
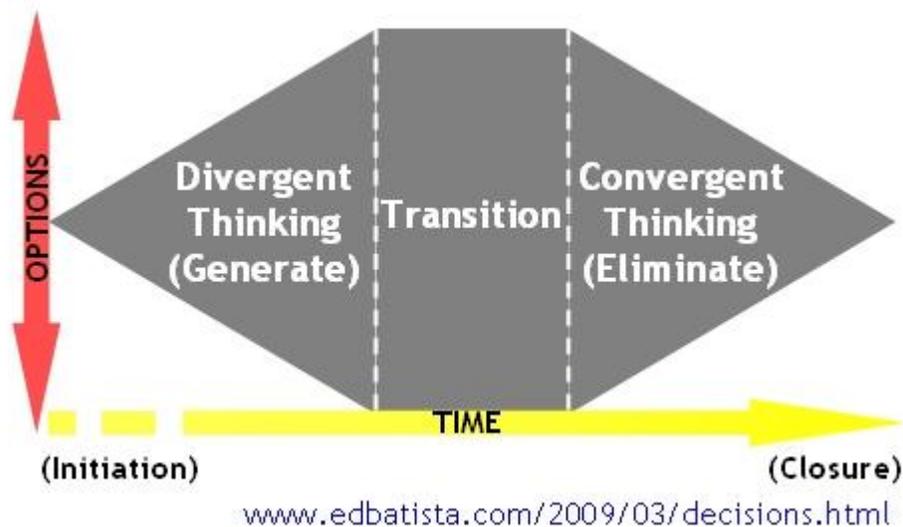
I find it liberating to start thinking along these lines, not only in my professional life but also in my personal life. *Where can I deliver excellence? Where should I expect excellence in return? And how can I focus my time and energy to make this as likely as possible?*

This allows me to do some strategic quitting--or even better, not to start misguided efforts in the first place--and substantially increase the return on my personal investments. And even when I can't quit outright, I'm better able to set boundaries that put projects and activities in perspective and prevent them from hogging resources (most significantly, my finite time and energy) that they don't deserve.

Photo by alexdecarvalho. Yay Flickr and Creative Commons.

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2007/07/the-dip.html

5. On Decision-Making

Divergent Thinking (Generate) — Transition — Convergent Thinking (Eliminate)

OPTIONS — TIME — (Initiation) — (Closure)

www.edbatista.com/2009/03/decisions.html

Here's a simple framework to help guide any decision-making process (and here's a one-slide PowerPoint of the graphic above [58 KB]):

1) Initiate the process in *divergent thinking* mode, generating as many options as possible. Be deliberate about keeping all options on the table in this stage, and stay there as long as necessary **and no longer.** (Spending too much time in this stage can be just as counterproductive as spending too little.)

2) At the end of this stage, mark a clear transition in the process. Take a break or simply note that you're shifting gears. If it's a group process, be certain that everyone involved is ready to move on, and get everyone's affirmative commitment before doing so. (Trying to move on before everyone's ready can seriously undermine the group's investment in the final outcome.) And be aware that the next stage will require a different mindset (and different ways of interacting in a group); use the transition period to make any necessary changes.

3) Begin to move toward closure by entering *convergent thinking* mode, eliminating options using whatever criteria you've chosen. You may realize after entering this stage that you (or another member of the group) are still focused on generating options and aren't ready to begin eliminating them. If so, either return to the previous stage or let go of the need to continue generating options. (It may feel inefficient take a step back in the process, but it's even less efficient to try to reach closure when you're still generating options.)

I first encountered this framework in Sam Kaner's Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making (thanks to my colleague Andrea Corney), which I highly recommend. And I was reminded of it recently when helping someone think about his career path. His first inclination was to put himself through an extensive round of aptitude tests

and other assessments. But in the 2008 edition of [What Color Is Your Parachute?](),*
Richard Bolles notes that testing can be a poor way to begin a career planning
process, using a framework similar to Kaner's to make his point:

> Most computerized tests embody the idea of starting with a wide range of
> options, and narrowing them down. So each time you answer a question, you
> narrow down the number of options...
>
> Good career-choice or career planning postpones the "narrowing down" until it
> has first broadened your horizons and expanded the number of options you are
> thinking about... You first expand your mental horizons, to see all the
> possibilities, and only then do you start to narrow them down to the particular
> two of three that interest you most.
>
> So what's a good test? *All together now:* a test that shows you more
> possibilities for your life.
>
> And what's a bad test? *Again, together:* a test that narrows the possibilities for
> your life.

(I'd modify those last two statements by noting that a good test shows you more
possibilities *when you're generating options*--and a test that narrows possibilities can
serve a useful purpose *when you're eliminating options*. But I fully agree with Bolles'
larger points that tests *usually* narrow our options, and we *usually* jump into
convergent thinking mode too early in any decision-making process.)

None of this is rocket science, by any means, but I'm struck by how often our decision-
making (particularly in group settings) could be improved by a more conscious
application of this simple framework.

---

* In [a recent review in the *Wall Street Journal*]() of Martha Finney's [Rebound: A Proven
Plan for Starting Over After Job Loss](), Eric Felten suggests that Bolles' perennial best-
seller "*could stand to be retired... [W]ith its clumsy charts and checklists, its hokey
visualization devices and hollow platitudes...it feels less like a book than the
rummage of a community-college guidance counselor. And dusty rummage at that.*"
Felten makes a valid point--the ancient cartoons and hodge-podge graphics make
"Parachute" feel woefully out-of-date, and there are some sections that should be
revised or scrapped. I think the book's continued dominance of the career-planning
category is based more on its reputation than its current value, but all that said,
there's still wisdom to be found there, particularly in Bolles' emphasis on self-
awareness and understanding.

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2009/03/decisions.html

6. The Virtues of Being Unsettled

Phred Dvorak's *"Theory & Practice" column* in the March 2, 2009 *Wall Street Journal* talks about the dangers of experience:

> "The more experience we have, the more overconfident we get," [says Kishore Sengupta, an associate professor at INSEAD who designs simulations that test for effectiveness in areas such as project management.]

> Alan Over, a managing consultant at U.K.-based PA Consulting Group who participated in Mr. Sengupta's simulation, says he now questions his assumptions more... "I try to force myself to be nervous," [Over] says. "Whenever I find myself falling back on what I did last time, or think I'm doing well, I try to **unsettle** myself." [My emphasis]

I suspect Over's strategy of "forcing myself to be nervous" is an over-correction, but he's touching on an important dynamic. I've found that I'm more likely to make mistakes when I'm too comfortable, when I assume that I understand a situation because it feels familiar--in a word, when I'm **settled**.

So although I don't think it would be helpful to make myself nervous--which I associate with feelings of inadequacy and incompetence--I fully agree that it's helpful to **unsettle** myself, to shake myself up to heighten awareness and ward off overconfidence. In fact, I do my best work as a coach when I trust myself enough to ask the right questions but don't believe that I have the right answers for the client-- that balance allows me to make effective use of my instincts, while allowing the client to find the answers that are right for them.

Coaching conversations are all so different and go in such unexpected directions that it's easy for me to maintain a "productively unsettled" state of mind in that setting. But I can readily fall prey to the dangers of experience while doing other work, and Dvorak's article is a helpful reminder to challenge myself when I'm feeling comfortable and relying on past experience to guide my actions and choices. As professor Vijay Govindarajan of Dartmouth College's Tuck School of Business notes in the *WSJ*: *"Experience becomes a liability in times of change."*

Photo by TheLizardQueen. Yay Flickr and Creative Commons.

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2009/03/unsettled.html

7. Grant McCracken on the Elements of Reinvention

When we sit down to make change happen, when we seek to reinvent our organizations (and ourselves), what dynamics characterize that process?

Grant McCracken has come up with a short list based on his recent work on a "reinvention exercise" with "a large American corporation." I intend to refer back to this regularly in my own work, so I'm pulling out the key phrases that caught my attention, but you really should read the whole thing:

1. Furiously Framing and Reframing

...a really liquid kind of problem solving. We are framing and reframing and reframing yet again...until the wisdom of this little crowd becomes apparent.

2. Tagging

Vivid pictures and phrases get the job done... Good ideas have no hope of surviving to maturity and adoption unless (or until) they are well tagged.

3. Pattern Migration

There are wonderful moments when someone will say, "look, here's something we know about this context. I wonder if we could transfer this to another problem set."

4. Scaling Up, Scaling Down

At one moment, we were dealing with the biggest possible problem sets in the broadest possible ways. The next, we have zeroed down to a very particular problem.

5. Messier Models

We saw people insisting on messier models in order to honor some of the messiness in the world in the model. The bigger point to make here is that as the world gets messier, more multiple, more various and changeable, discourse about change is beginning to take on these structural properties.

6. Acknowledging Fear

For the first time, I saw people building models of process that acknowledge the emotional difficulties inherent in the change making process. Everyone always feels the pain of entertaining new ideas and having to give up old verities, but this used to be a very private condition. Now people are openly

acknowledging it.

7. New Language like "Chunking"

When problem sets are really messing and heard to read, "chunking" is useful. It's a way of saying let's call this [thing] a something. Because we are chunking we are not obliged to say or to know what it means. We are just saying "there's something here we need to look at."

8. Porousness

People are now prepared to acknowledge that the corporation is no longer a free standing, discrete entity. It is customary to hear people dealing with the fact that the corporation has loose boundaries.

Grant's conclusion after coming up with this list?

All of these new intellectual inclinations and practices suggest I think that the corporation is learning to live with dynamism by learning how to practice dynamism.

Three of these dynamics jump out at me and seem closely intertwined: **tagging**, **messier models**, and **acknowledging fear**. Grant's reference to the importance of tagging ideas reminds me of Howard Gardner's emphasis on "representational redescriptions" in the influence process:

A change of mind becomes convincing to the extent that it lends itself to representation in a number of different forms, with these forms reinforcing each other...

"Messy models" reminds me of Pema Chödrön's embrace of imperfection:

[T]rying to tie up all the loose ends and get it together is death, because it involves rejecting a lot of your basic experience. There is something aggressive about that approach to life, trying to flatten out all the rough spots and imperfections into a nice smooth ride... Death is wanting to hold on to what you have and to have every experience confirm you and congratulate you and make you feel completely together.

And I'm particularly struck by Grant's inclusion of fear as a key factor to be addressed (or at least acknowledged) in any reinvention or change management process. (He goes a step further and references any "emotional difficulty" in the text, but I agree that "fear" made for a better headline.) Our inability to sense, legitimize and express our emotions in the workplace creates a huge gap between our collective and our individual experiences. For example, I'm scared or angered by your proposal, but I can't effectively communicate those feelings at work, so you never truly understand my position--and we're left wondering why we make so little progress!

A link I see among these three dynamics is an acceptance of the fact that our brains

work in ways that are often described as "irrational" (or at the very least run counter to many notions of rationality):

Ideas stick when they're made vivid and colorful--and even the best ideas will die if not made sticky.

The world is messy and complicated--and models that incorporate the mess are actually more useful to us than reductive, straightforward ones.

And we're scared and angry--a lot!--and pretending those feelings aren't there doesn't make them go away.

Much of my work as a coach and group facilitator involves helping people better understand and express feelings that typically get ignored in a professional setting, and Grant's observations suggest to me that this is precisely what we need to do more of when we're involved in any change-making process.

Photo by [Pop!Tech 2004](). © All rights reserved.

Original Post: [http://www.edbatista.com/2008/03/grant-mccracken.html]()

8. Headaches, Opportunities, Dreams

Here's a simple framework for thinking through a set of challenges:

Headaches
These are problems you encounter on a regular basis. The issue is how to eliminate (or work around) them.

Opportunities
These are things you'd like to do with the resources and skills currently at your disposal. The issue is how to re-allocate your resources and/or re-deploy your skills to take fullest advantage of each opportunity.

Dreams
These are things you'd like to do in a perfect world. The issue is what additional resources or skills you need to turn a dream into an opportunity.

Photos by [Lazy Lightning](#), [destinelee](#) and [Daquella manera](#). Yay Flickr and Creative Commons.

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2007/03/headaches.html

9. Are You A Searcher Or A Planner?

When it comes to how we solve problems, there are basically two types of people: Searchers and Planners. Searchers see a need, identify a feasible solution, find the resources required to get started, and hit the ground running. Planners see a need, identify the best solution, find the resources required to finish the job, and launch when success is (theoretically) assured.

I was reminded of this dichotomy by Jason Riley's op-ed in the August 21, 2006 *Wall Street Journal* on the different approaches to treating malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. Riley writes approvingly of entrepreneurial Searchers, who "prefer to work case-by-case, using trial and error to tailor solutions to individual problems, fully aware that most remedies must be homegrown." And he sneers at the bureaucratic Planners who, while well-meaning, take a large-scale, top-down approach to issues such as poverty, which they see as "technical engineering problem[s] that [their] answers will solve," in the words of economist William Easterly.

I don't know ~~much~~ anything about malaria or public health policy, so I can't comment on the aptness of Riley's comments in this particular case. But I agree with his larger perspective: Planning is overrated and sometimes even counterproductive. I know from personal experience that planning can become an end in itself--you can get so caught up in the process of planning that the plan becomes a proxy for the problem, and when the plan's complete you feel a sense of accomplishment, even though all you've done is finish the plan!

At Stanford's Graduate School of Business I studied entrepreneurship with the brilliant Chuck Holloway, and one of the principles he stressed was the importance of being able to pull back, assess your progress (or lack thereof), and adjust course accordingly. He taught us to avoid unnecessary long-term commitments and plans that can't be revised and to keep our planning horizons realistically short.

This philosophy is essential in any entrepreneurial situation where resources are tightly constrained and the future is highly uncertain, but I'd argue that it can be just as useful in other circumstances. In fact, a lack of resource constraints can be a distinct disadvantage because it can lead to an overemphasis on planning at the expense of actual work.

I see a parallel in the rise of the rapid development approach to software in the 1980s, which replaced longer-term, planning intensive models. As Wikipedia notes, "The problem with previous methodologies was that applications took so long to build that requirements had changed before the system was complete, often resulting in unusable systems." Bingo. And that's not just a problem with software development.

I don't mean to suggest that planning's useless. Eisenhower was a pretty thorough Planner, and it's hard to argue with the results of D-Day. But every planning process should be tailored to fit the situation, and we need to keep in mind the tendency of plans to consume available time and resources. I also think we need to understand where we sit on the Searcher-Planner spectrum as individuals, because sometimes our natural inclinations will be just the right fit for the circumstances, while at other times we'll need to push beyond our comfort zone or find someone else to do the job.

One of my favorite stories about planning comes from Joan Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking, her moving, thoughtful and surprisingly funny memoir about coping with several deaths in her family. She writes about her first years of marriage to the writer John Gregory Dunne:

> My memory of those years is that both John and I were improvising, flying blind. When I was clearing out a file drawer recently I came across a thick file labeled "Planning." The very fact that we made files labeled "Planning" suggests how little of it we did. We also had "planning meetings," which consisted of sitting down with legal pads, stating the day's problem out loud, and then, with no further attempt to solve it, going out to lunch. Such lunches were festive, as if to celebrate a job well done.

I think we've all been there.

POSTSCRIPT: In response to this post, Greg Neichin passed on a great line from Herb Kelleher, co-founder and former CEO of Southwest Airlines:

> We have a "strategic plan." It's called doing things.

Original Post: http://www.edbatista.com/2006/08/are_you_a_searc.html

Ed Batista
Executive Coaching & Change Management Consulting

464 Funston Avenue   +1.415.235.4272
San Francisco, CA 94118   edbatista@gmail.com

edbatista.com

About Me   about.edbatista.com

Professional
I'm an executive coach, a change management consultant, and a Leadership Coach at Stanford's Graduate School of Business. I help individuals find professional fulfillment and develop their leadership and interpersonal skills; I help people work together more effectively as members of a team; and I help companies and nonprofits adapt their management practices and organizational culture to better fit their changing needs.

My work as a coach began after a 15-year career in management, during which I took two years off to earn an MBA at Stanford, and I've helped launch three new organizations. In addition to coaching and change management, I'm particularly interested in the intersection of organizational culture and social technology.

Personal
I've lived in San Francisco since 1990; I'm married to Amy Wright, a recovering corporate attorney-turned-law school librarian; and I'm passionate about listening to music (particularly jazz, but I love punk, blues and bluegrass as well), hiking throughout the Bay Area, and visiting New Orleans whenever possible.

What I Do   services.edbatista.com

Put simply, I help individuals find professional fulfillment; I help people work together more effectively as members of a team; and I help companies and nonprofits adapt their management practices and organizational culture to better fit their changing needs.

My coaching services are aimed at helping people be as fulfilled and as effective as possible in their professional lives. I work with individuals to assist them in unlocking their full potential, meeting new challenges, and developing their skills. People often find an executive coach a helpful resource when they're...

- Starting a new job
- Taking on new responsibilities
- Coping with a changing environment

- Considering a new position or career
- Addressing areas for improvement
- Simply trying to get "unstuck"

I'd be happy to have an initial conversation to discuss your needs and how we might work together. My contact information is above, or you can reach me at contact.edbatista.com.