

S.U.R.F. Transitions to Be the Best You – Personally and Professionally



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Abstract

Life is marked by continuous transitions—career shifts, relationship changes, retirement, and other milestones—that often bring both opportunity and uncertainty. Navigating these transitions effectively requires clarity, authenticity, and intentional action. The S.U.R.F. framework—Say Goodbye, Understand, Reframe, and Follow-through—offers a structured approach to embracing change personally and

professionally. **Saying** goodbye honors the past and creates closure; **Understanding** promotes deep self-reflection and awareness; **Reframing** allows individuals to challenge limiting beliefs and view challenges as opportunities; and **Follow-through** emphasizes intentional action and resilience in moving forward. By applying this method, transitions are no longer seen as disruptions but as catalysts for growth and transformation. The S.U.R.F. model

empowers individuals to approach change with confidence, balance, and purpose, unlocking their potential to “be the best you” in every stage of life.

Introduction

Life is a series of transitions (Bridges, 2019, Feiler, 2020, Conley, 2024) . Whether it's a career change, entering or leaving a relationship, retiring, or any other significant milestone, transitions can bring both excitement and uncertainty. Some embrace new opportunities with enthusiasm, while others face opportunities with apprehension and fear. However, understanding how to navigate transitions with intention and authenticity can ease the process and promote personal and professional growth.

Every transition consists of an ending, a middle, and a beginning (Bachmann 2024, Feiler, 2020). Without closure, moving forward becomes difficult, and without clarity, the future remains uncertain. The S.U.R.F. method—**S**ay Goodbye, **U**nderstand, **R**eframe, and **F**ollow-through—provides a structured, intentional approach to navigating life's transitions with presence, intent, and balance. This paper explores how adopting the S.U.R.F. framework allows individuals to embrace change, unlock personal growth, and navigate transitions with confidence.

S.U.R.F.: The Key to Navigating Transitions

S – Say Goodbye

People age and face transitions daily. The impact of a transition depends on how it is experienced. For this paper, a minor transition is one that causes minimal emotional turmoil (e.g., a child leaves for college which generates excitement for the child and for the parent). Conversely, a major transition leads to emotional chaos because of uncertainty as to how to handle a situation (e.g., a child leaves for college and the parent experiences an empty-nest identity crisis). (Dweck, 2006; Feiler, 2021; Bridges, 2019)

Before stepping into the next phase of life, it is essential to honor the conclusion of the previous phase. Many devise a ritual to mark this transition. Saying goodbye is more than just leaving or letting go; it is about acknowledging what was, expressing gratitude, and consciously releasing attachments.

Establishing a ritual between each phase of life is a practice that some people find helpful (Vermani, 2025; Christina, 2023) (Menzies, 2018). A ritual of “letting go” could include, 1) recognizing the significance of our past, 2) visualizing our future, and 3) doing something that symbolizes our intentional transition.

To recognize one's past, take time to reflect and acknowledge the journey (Neff, 2018) (Tan, 2012). What led up to this time? What was learned, experienced, and gained from the journey? How can the growth that was achieved be embraced?

Next, visualize the future in as much detail as possible (Denborough, 2014) (Vermani, 2025). Get to the heart of what has been calling. Meditate, journal - How is life different? How have thoughts and emotions changed?

Finally, design an intentional act that will symbolize this transition - dance by a bonfire with close friends, go on an adventure, or destroy something that symbolizes the past and identify something to symbolize the future (Bridges, 2019) (Denborough, 2014). Find a way to celebrate this transition.

When we learn to say goodbye to ourselves and the situation with honor, the foundation for the next phase is laid. Closure allows us to move forward with clarity rather than uncertainty.

U – Understand

Once the transition has begun, the next phase involves **self-reflection** and **understanding**. This stage can be the most challenging, as it often involves uncertainty, discomfort, and emotional turbulence.

The goal of self-reflection is to understand ourselves without the titles, responsibilities, and with all of life's decorations and trappings – just the bare person underneath it all. This reflection can be challenging, sometimes requiring support from coach, mentor or therapist to help uncover blind spots in thoughts, beliefs, habits, actions, etc. As people grow their self-reflection muscles, they become less reliant on other means of support (Tawwab, 2021) (Cloud, 1992).

The understanding phase is hard. It can be confusing. Embrace and accept the uncertainty and lean into the discomfort to encourage personal growth (Tan, 2012; Labalme, 2021). The character Jimmy Dugan from "A League of Their Own" said, *'If it was easy, everyone would do it.'* (Marshall, 1992)

People are hardwired to resist change (Stark, 2020) (Brown, 2015). The brain favors predictability and stability. Change introduces uncertainty and can trigger fear and anxiety. The brain likes to catastrophize the outcomes of change – imagining what one would lose, what could go wrong, even how one is not good enough to be that future self.

In addition, as a person changes, family and close friends may not embrace this change since they will be forced to act and behave differently. As

a result, others may pressure a person to stay the same. Understanding personal motives and the impact of change on others will assist with establishing boundaries and maintaining interactions with others.

During this phase, introspection is key. Rather than rushing to the next step, pausing to assess personal values, strengths, and areas for improvement allows for deeper self-awareness. The middle of a transition might feel messy, but clarity emerges through thoughtful reflection and understanding.

R – Reframe

Reframing is **about shifting perspective and embracing new possibilities**. As understanding is achieved, people can challenge existing mindsets, break limiting beliefs, and reshape their outlook.

Once understanding is gained, the narrative can be reframed. People are great storytellers – especially to themselves. Take one of the understandings gained and it breaks down into the facts and the story - the facts are things that do not change; the story is what one makes up about those facts (Menzies, 2018).

For example, Sarah was preparing to retire. She had saved money, her children were secure, yet she felt she had no life outside of her career. While coaching Sarah, she

discovered that she had a lot of interests she had put on the backburner of her life. She wanted to walk the El Camino. She wanted to learn to play the drums. She wanted time to explore who she was without work. When we broke down the stories, she was telling herself that kept her from retiring, she realized that her fears could be re-written. She could reframe her situation. She was able to resign and embrace the life she always dreamed about that aligned her actions with genuine self-awareness and personal truth.

By reframing challenges as opportunities for growth, a fresh perspective can be developed, and the final stage of transition can be entered with renewed purpose and enthusiasm (Denborough, 2014).

F – Follow-through

With newfound clarity and a redefined outlook, it is time to implement intentional steps toward a new beginning. The follow-through stage focuses on action, commitment, and balance. Be adventurous, explore. Only through action can change happen.

Create a detailed plan to include actionable steps (Conley, 2024). Keep this vision in mind as decisions are made as to what and how to spend time and energy on for desired

outcomes. Be intentional about establishing realistic and actionable next steps to ensure steady progress.

As action on the plan begins, be present and mindful to understand self and the situation. This allows transitions to proceed with patience and adaptability while fostering resilience (Crisp, 2020) (Maul, 2019).

Also be mindful that not every plan turns out the way one expects. Being open to changes and deviations along the journey can be a great opportunity for learning and growth. Seek guidance from mentors, friends, or professionals to provide strength during uncertain times.

The follow-through phase solidifies the transition by turning vision into reality. By executing planned steps, individuals step into their new phase with authenticity and confidence.

Conclusion

Navigating transitions can be daunting, but with the S.U.R.F. Bridges, W. (2019). *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*. Balance.

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method—Say Goodbye, Understand, Reframe, and Follow-through — changes can be approached with intention and authenticity. Instead of viewing transitions as disruptions, they become opportunities for growth, transformation, and personal evolution.

Understanding that every transition consists of an ending, a middle, and a beginning provides perspective. Rather than resisting change, embracing the process allows individuals to unlock new opportunities, redefine their aspirations, and step confidently into their next chapter.

By honoring the past, gaining clarity in the present, reshaping beliefs, and taking committed action, anyone can S.U.R.F. through life's transitions with balance, presence, and intent.

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Biography: Sandra Menzies, MS, ICF-PCC & ACC at Menzies Coaching & Consulting Sandy worked as a project manager in the biomedical field. She established quality systems and managed process improvement efforts. This experience provided her with a foundation for being a Coach and Consultant. She believes one can make positive changes in their lives and organizations. Sandy's decades-long interest in yoga and meditation led her to Transformational Coaching, helping others reach their full potential. She spent years gaining education and training, becoming certified by the International Coaching Federation (ICF) as a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) and a Certified Mentor Coach (CMC). Sandy also holds certifications as a Transformational Coach through the Modern Elder Academy (MEA) and Asperger's/Autism Employment Coach