



Creating Clarity in a Chaotic World: Changing with Intent

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Once you begin a journey filled with intent you are engaged in a process of human evolution. There is no turning back. Your headlamps are dual beams of curiosity and courage illuminating your voyage. The engine of this process is a humming commitment to self-awareness – a fearless inventory of who you are, what serves you, what doesn't, and why.

- Susan Schaefer

Good morning. Thank you Kathy, Nancy and DLR Group for providing sustenance and this soaring corporate cathedral as a sanctuary for this morning's discussion. And Kathy, thank you for being the wind beneath my wings for these past years.

This morning I hope to spark your imagination, to light your center of hope and trust, so that each of you can create change with intent in this clamoring chaotic world.

I've chosen intentionally not to use any visuals. Therefore, I invite you to listen intently. At the end of my talk, I'll provide you with a handout of my presentation complete with references, so I encourage you please not to take notes. Sit back, breathe, relax for a brief hour, and let your ears and heart be open.

I'll cover four broad areas this morning. First, I'll link my personal story to my work as a

coach. Second, I'll provide sociological and scientific data about distraction, the disconnect it causes, and the profound pace of change in modern society. Third, I'll share some brain science facts about why and how working with a coach assists you to make change with intent. And lastly, I'll outline four steps – a call to action - that you need to take in order to embark upon your own intentional transition.

Okay? Good. So, let's begin by standing in place. Relax everything, your shoulders all the way down. Let your arms just hang. Don't hold tension anywhere. I'll guide you in some centering breathing. We're going to take a deep breath way down into the bottom of your tummy completely filling it, and breathe out very slowly through your mouth pursing your lips to create a kind of *pssst* sound. Okay? Let me guide you. Close your eyes, now we'll do this three times.

Perfect. Please take your seats and try your best to hold onto this feeling. Allow yourself to be here now minus distractions for the next 40 or so minutes. Be relaxed and present.

Think of this time as a gift to your very well being. You won't need to jot notes because you'll get the full text at the end of my talk.

My Story

Twelve years ago I began the process of making an intentional change in my life. As you may have ascertained from Kathy's introduction, I was a successful yet overly busy public relations and communications executive and educator. I was blissfully married to my soul mate, Martijn Hermse, a gentle, wise, philosopher from the Netherlands, who greatly inspired and influenced my thinking and being.

We lived five years on the peaceful banks of Lake Minnetonka in Cottagewood, thereafter relocating to the Seward neighborhood of Minneapolis. After four years of deep civic inner-city involvement, I felt moved to make a profound and intentional change.

At that juncture, I had achieved a wide-ranging set of goals in both my personal and professional life. I was married to the man of my dreams; I had been appointed and elected to top leadership positions in my field of communications, and in my business and civic communities.

So, what happened? Here I was at a plateau of self-accomplishment, yet, I desired to find more meaningful ways to serve the wider world. One of my teachers and mentors, Dr. Don Beck, who co-authored *Spiral Dynamics*, outlines the two typical trajectories that create change. The obvious is what he calls the crisis trigger. Things hit rock bottom and you have to make a shift.

But the other push is when grounded and accomplished humans simply continue along an ever-expanding path of personal development. Call this stretching to change. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of *Flow* and *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*, has researched and written extensively about such personal development.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is a major influence and resource for my own change process, and my writings and teachings.

Like all intentional transitions should, my change process began with a deep and probing self-reflection. I was at a juncture where I did what I did well, AND as Beck and Csikszentmihalyi stress, I needed to stretch. What links my personal story to my work is that I activated a process I had been practicing with my own corporate and organizational clients for years, one that blends the logic of strategic planning with the holism of mind-body centering. I researched, found, and began working with one professional and one spiritual coach, also taking workshops and training sessions, and planning together with my husband and in community.

My first coach was a talented spiritual coach – a PhD clinical psychologist, trained as a cantor and rabbi. She mingled meditation, journaling, bodywork, and centering practices. With her, I devised a personal vision that I still hold. We also began formulating my mission and values. Concurrently, I retained a professional coach from a reputable management firm who took me through various formal assessments and evaluations, such as the Myers-Briggs and Strong Skills Inventory. I had taken such assessments early in my career, so the up-to-date feedback was invaluable.

Eventually, I clearly identified what I needed to live a life that was 100% aligned with who I was – with my values and my physical bearing. All along the way my husband and I met and checked in together, so that he was able to flow with and support my eventual transition, which would be OUR intentional transition.

In my upcoming book, *Intentional Transitions: A Guide*, I developed a planning device I term the *Transition Wheel*[®] to help incorporate various segments of our multi-stratified life into our change process. Like a spider web, when you make a change in one part of the wheel of life, the other sections reverberate. Intentional planning is a holistic practice.

Once I identified a path that resembled alignment for Martijn and me, I began to formulate a strategic plan to operationalize the more ethereal vision, mission and values.

This bears repeating because the promise of this morning's presentation is ***how to find clarity amidst the chaos***. My primary work was locating my body-spirit center. Armed with that fundamental personal self-awareness, I also probed deeply through the clutter and chaos of one's normal career "noise" and "distraction" to ***find a path that would be aligned with my very core***. My core was 100% attached to my husband's, so we planned in tandem.

My planning validated making a career shift to Public Affairs, specializing in European Union policymaking, leadership and change. One of my wishes was to live in my husband's country, learning more about the forces that shaped him, living in the bosom of his family. I was accepted at a prestigious mid-career graduate program located in my husband's home city, Maastricht, the Netherlands. With much effort and support of countless friends and colleagues, we downsized, sold our home, and moved to Europe where I entered then graduated from Maastricht University's Master's of European Public Affairs program.

This planned transition was going very well when my beloved husband discovered a cancerous tumor. Enter the chaos that is life - the unplanned journey - the unintentional transition.

After a heroic two-year battle, Martijn died as gently and peacefully as he had lived, surrounded by the light and love of his friends and family. But as you can surmise, a part of me died with him.

I cannot properly convey the chaos that this kind of loss brings. Some of you, alas, know it. Whether it is loss of life, limb, work, home - the chaos is black and total. It is the removal of all light from the very depths of one's soul and purpose for being.

Yet, even during the pits of that darkness, I sensed that the transition I had begun with

such abiding intent meant that I would emerge again whole. My life had spoken, my friends around the world held me up, and I began a long journey back to center.

Essential to this unplanned continuing transition from a two to a one, was my closely held circle of friends. Part of my coaching work with clients is teaching how to develop what I term a *Decision Circle*® - an intentional forging together of those near and dear to you, so that they are able to properly support you.

It has taken me the intervening four years to properly grieve the great loss of my beloved. During that time I continued to work for Maastricht University, as well as for other European NGO's and programs. But most importantly, I kept up my mind-body centering practices, even when all I wanted was to die. In spite of my grief, I kept fit, whole and complete. I learned to listen to my body, to sense signs of anxiety, to read the whole that is my human form.

Eventually, I relocated back to the United States.

The rigor and intentionality of my planning process served two purposes. The first moved me toward my professional goal; the second got me through the chaos of wrenching loss, allowing me to integrate and transcend the sum of my experiences, to embrace the life that awaited me. The very process of staying present with the pain of my loss has informed my work as a coach and guide, making it better and stronger.

As I stated at the beginning of my talk: *Once you begin a journey filled with intent you are engaged in a process of human evolution. There is no turning back. Your headlamps are dual beams of curiosity and courage illuminating your voyage. The engine of this process is a humming commitment to self-awareness - a fearless inventory of who you are, what serves you, what doesn't, and why.*

Making meaningful, permanent change is not a course in miracles and wishful thinking. As in all times of great upheaval, such as our

present time, the gypsies, tramps and thieves come forward offering crystals and prayers alone, convincing the unwary that simply thinking positively will get you a new red Audi, a second home in Tuscany, or riverfront loft. Ain't happenin', as we say in Philly.

Changing with intent need not be an arduous and time consuming process, but we are talking about process not instant soup. Be aware of those offering spiritual relics – often they are cardboard, glue and glitter.

Distraction and disconnect

My guess is that most of you are not looking to make such grand scale change as I did. So let's turn to the distractions, disconnect, and pace of change we all experience in today's tech turmoil, and see what brain science reveals about our chaotic work and personal lives.

I have a request. I'd like everyone who does not own a smart phone to stay seated. Would everyone who has a smart phone, whatever brand, please stand.

Great. Thanks. Now, I'd like those of you who are still seated who don't have a cell phone to stay seated and the others please stand.

Okay, now, those of you still seated who don't use a computer stay seated and the others please stand.

(Dinosaur awards.)

Now, would everyone standing please listen carefully. If you've never answered a call while driving, OR never answered the phone, or checked your messages, email or gone online while working on some other task, stay standing.

Everyone else please sit.

(Small ruler awards for linear processing.)

Thank you for this experiment. You've helped to illustrate some of the points we're going to cover.

What happens when you multi-task?

Here are some frightening facts and figures you may have previously heard. They are worth repeating and emphasizing.

Today's technology represents the dual edged sword of more efficiently helping us to manage our lives, while simultaneously creating countless distractions, increasing rather than decreasing the chaos! Did you know:

- Only 2% of people can successfully multi- task;
- Almost 90% of people with smartphones use them at work although almost half of American workers admit they already have too much work;
- Trying to focus on more than one thing at once causes a 40% drop in productivity!
- On average, employees who use a computer for work are **distracted once every 10½ minutes**;
- This translates to a loss of **2.1 hours a day to interruptions or distractions**.
- Which means that **an average American office worker loses over 13 weeks or 3 months a year!** That's a three-month decline in productivity a year.
- From the employer's point of view, that's paying one-year's salary for working 8 months.

But here's the real kicker:

- Being **distracted at work by calls or emails lowers your IQ by 10 points**, which is the equivalent to missing a full night of sleep, or twice the effect

- of smoking a large marijuana cigarette!
- Being distracted also lowers your emotional equivalency or EQ, making most people unpleasant to be with because they are not fully present, not paying full attention. Our society is rapidly being reduced to the attention spans of ADD adolescents.¹ It's not fun, it's not funny.

Now, these numbers are primarily about technological distractions.

What about the countless other distractions of modern life? Such as:

- Getting your kids to ...fill in the blank...school, sports, birthday parties,
- Not to mention tracking their computer usage, who their friends are, what they're eating.
- Or, checking in or caring for your aging elders.
- Making time for civic duties, cultural events, enjoying time with your family and friends?
- Oh yeah, what about minding your diet?
- Getting proper exercise?
- Making down time?

Whew.

Increasing complexity in modern life

Our daily lives are not like those of our parents or grandparents.

Since the late 1970s, there have been groundbreaking authors who predicted with chilling accuracy the impact of post-industrialism and the social and cultural evolution that accompanies the dizzying rate of change in our 21st century lives.

Alvin Toffler of *Future Shock* fame, John Naisbitt, whose work *Megatrends* has had

profound impact on the thinking of today's futurists, and Daniel Bell, whose masterworks, *The End of Ideology* and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, were listed by the *Times Literary Supplement* as among the 100 most important books in the second half of the twentieth century.

These authors all argued that the industrial era is coming to an end, and services and information are supplanting industry and goods. They were spot on, and you and I are living in one of the most disruptive times of recorded history.

In his 1999 book, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, futurist Ray Kurzweil wrote about the imminent course of humanity. He predicted that modern humanity is experiencing "technological change so rapid and profound **it represents a rupture in the fabric of human history.**" He formulated an equation that translates to this astounding statistic: In the 21st century – one hundred years of time – rather than experiencing 100 years of progress, we are experiencing 20,000 years of progress at today's rate! It is unfathomable.

How do these disruptions impact us?

In his book, *CrazyBusy: Overbooked, Overstretched, and About to Snap!*, author Edward Hallowell, MD, says, "You've got to take back control.... The great thing about modern life is you can do so much, and the curse of modern life is you can do so much."

My challenge to you is to accept that you can make a change if your busyness isn't translating to satisfaction, productivity, or is actually causing you pain. The former would be a stretch shift; the latter a crisis change.

Hallowell says our busyness is **an epidemic**, and remarks that, "People joke about being crazy busy...they brag about it, **like being busy is a status symbol.** But they don't realize that it's as harmful for them as obesity or cigarette smoking."

1

http://www.prdaily.com/Main/Articles/Infographic_Only_2_percent_of_people_can_multitask_12456.aspx

Multitasking causes the brain to overheat just like a car engine. Hollowell reminds us that the brain needs periods to recover. Sleeping at night isn't enough, and besides how many of you actually get a solid, restful, full night's sleep? The brain needs periods of rest and recovery all day, it can't function optimally all day long at peak performance.

Type A people, (anyone in the audience?), who feel obliged to respond to every email, can work themselves into what Dr. Hollowell dubs *the F-State - frantic, frazzled, frenzied*. These folks get toxic stress, burning up energy rapidly and wastefully. And in that state, they do bad work, lose friends, and lose clients. It's bad for them in every measurable way.

If you don't prioritize, you'll go in many directions at once and not do anything well. "You really need to be very clear about what matters most to you," says Hollowell. "It won't happen automatically. *If you don't take your time, your time will be taken from you*... If you de-stress, ... prioritize, everything gets better – your physical health, your longevity, your enjoyment of life."²

How then in this noisy, complex world of pressures and choices do we find a way to still the noise for long enough to hear our inner sounds, our deeper callings? Amidst the rattle and rumble of mobile phone rings, email dings, children's soccer appointments, piles of unanswered correspondences from superiors, subordinates, family, friends and colleagues, where do we find the answering device of our own soul? How do we, as Dr. Hollowell suggests, de-stress?

Change with Intent

Let me turn to my work as a transitions coach. I call my method, *Intentional Transitions*®, with the focus on making change with intent.

Here's a definition of intent I love from author Don DeBrandt: Intent is "the focusing of will through intellect and informed by emotion."³

I'll repeat: Intent is "the focusing of will through intellect and informed by emotion." The primary concern of intent as such holds both action and meaning.

You are a "human being," my dear friend Carmen always reminded me, not a "human doing". Intentionality begins with consideration, reflection, deep exploration of consciousness, then moves on to finding purpose. So first getting to know self, then taking action.

Yet, the impact of modern behaviorist theory has created a significant focus on the fact that we can "convince" or "condition" ourselves to believe and act in certain ways (think of all the 12 step programs and the popular "act as if" movements). Many of us have accepted the idea of "creating our own purpose" without the associated training of meditative or reflective examination that allows us to more deeply "find our inner selves" or "hear our own inner voices". As the great author, lecturer, teacher, Parker Palmer says: "Let Your Life Speak," but to do so, embark on a true process.

As I stated in the beginning of this talk, there are many wizards out there who would have you believe that making meaningful, permanent change is a course in miracles and wishful thinking. Not so.

Effectively, efficiently breaking the cycle

Research and experience reveal that individuals who create a quiet retreat from the amplified 'noise' of our ever more complex lives enjoy more energy, focus and overall satisfaction. They claim to be able to create centeredness even the midst of turmoil. They set realistic goals and achieve them.

Advances in neuroscience clearly demonstrate that we can 'rewire' our brains and bodies to better focus our own energy. It is within the reach of most individuals to create productive habits and eliminate or minimize

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accelerating_change

³ Don DeBrandt, "His Dark Pharmaceuticals", (2005) *Navigating the Golden Compass*, BenBella Books, Dallas

unproductive ones. However, prayers alone do not accomplish this.

Coaching researcher and writer, Ann Betz, has written a study that connects the benefits of coaching with brain science research. Some of her findings:

- There is significant scientific proof for the exciting idea that the brain demonstrates ‘neuroplasticity.’ That is, it is more adaptable than we have previously thought, and it can — and does — change with effort and intention. As neuroplasticity expert Norman Doidge points out, there is substantial evidence we can “rewire our brains with our thoughts.”
- Due to a process called myelination, the more a pathway is used, the stronger it becomes. This is because every time we repeat an action, a fatty covering called myelin coats the neural pathway, making connections stronger and more secure. We have trillions of possible neural connections in our brains. Some of them have wired strongly into habits and behaviors that are effective, and some have wired into limiting beliefs and strategies that are not. And many exist simply as pure potential. **Because the default in our brain is to go with the pathways that are developed, it is difficult to change without focused, supported, intentional effort.**
- Coaching brings this sort of focus and support, thus it is possible that we are literally helping the client’s brain rewire itself for greater effectiveness.
- Additionally, one of the keys to neuroplasticity is novelty, which gets our attention and causes a release of a chemical in the brain that makes a new neural pathway possible.

- Coaches do this by challenging clients to stretch out of their comfort zones and take risks, encouraging clients to make bold leaps, not just do what they are already doing a little bit better. They also ask expansive, powerful questions which often lead the client to an “Aha” moment of clarity, a feeling of something new being opened before them.
- Coaches help people identify the pathways that are not working and focus on creating new ones that lead to more resonant, effective, fulfilling lives. Over time, through commitment, support, practice and reflection, those “Ahas” become dominant neural pathways and what was once a reach and challenge becomes commonplace. The client has transformed in a grounded, sustainable way.⁴

There is much more evidence in Betz’s report about how working with a trained, qualified coach can help you to create the clarity you need to change with intent.

Where do we begin?

Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakens.
- Carl Jung

There are as many paths to get to this point as there are individuals who wish to change but aren’t sure where to begin.

This morning, I’ve told you what motivated me to embark on a life-altering change, how the intentionality of that change was disrupted by the death of my husband, and how the power of my own preparation carried me through that disruption. We’ve examined the obvious disrupters that make life in today’s technological age sheer turmoil, and just how quickly these technological changes continue to evolve resulting in the exponential rate of change of 20,000 years in 100 years time!

⁴ http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CCcQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.thecoaches.com%2Fres%2Fpdf%2FCo-Active-Coaching-and-The-Brain.pdf&ei=lf2KUPz_NaT5ygh_3oCACw&usg=AFQjCNHteWHjfQWzmgUKYViGZeFCpaGLIQ

And, we've touched on how brain science supports that having a guide on the side, a coach, provides added value to your change process.

I end with a beginning: My four-point clarion call. These four talking points have been informed by a most astonishing Minnesotan, the Honorable Judge Tanya Bransford, whose career I've had the pleasure of following since her rise to leadership in Hennepin County. Judge Bransford, I have borrowed your Wake Up, Get Up, Stand Up, Stay Up, adapting it to my work. Thank you.

How do you begin to change?

1. Wake Up

Become aware. Wake up. Step up from your comfort zone and think about who you are and who you could become.

2. Get Up

Take action. Get up. Inquire. Seek ways to change that align with you. Come to talks like this. Ask your trusted others for advice and information. Shake off the dew!

3. Stand Up

Take a stand for yourself – for your development as a human being. During election time we hear many many complaints about how this elected official hasn't done enough. Well, what are you doing? Stand up. Figure out how you can make things better in your life. Then maybe you can stretch a little and figure out how it takes a village, a city, a county, a country filled with active concerned citizens to make meaningful, global change. Since when can one person do this? Stand up for yourself, stand up for others.

4. Stay up

The way to make permanent new behaviors is by rewiring our brains and our bodies. Stay up. We accomplish this through adapting purposeful practices. Tend your garden by creating comfortable daily practices to maintain a successful change. Do this on your own, or find a capable, comfortable, competent coach as a guide by your side.

How can Intentional Transitions Institute help?

Our clients and audiences are individuals and organizations who actively seek to influence and change their impact on their daily lives. Whether it is a desire to be more productive, increase fitness, spend more time with loved ones, gain more satisfaction at the workplace, improve social interactions, or any variety of personal objectives

Intentional Transition Institute provides multiple platforms for individual and group change. We:

- Guide our clients to recognize their own innermost motivations, dreams and world views.
- Explain that by listening to their own bodies they can learn the clues that trip bad behaviors and those that facilitate new and better habits.
- Explore how simple tasks such as journaling, yoga, or performing short meditations can create powerful new actions. From there we help them to create their own highly individualized plans with attainable self-derived goals.
- Emphasize how to tap "Group Wisdom," harnessing the power of your own circles of friends, family and acquaintances to help you to keep promises. We advocate simple yet elegant change.

Why? Our belief is that once individuals learn how to make effective incremental change, the fire is lit, they more fully develop their innate human potential, begin to seek ways to positively influence their immediate and broader communities, hopefully creating new paradigms for society as a whole.

As I've pointed out this morning, my teachings are informed by my own journey. And the process I offer may not be for everyone. However, I encourage everyone to find her or his own transition guide. She or he is there for you. This process of creating intention to guide your life's changes is a priceless tool that you can wield even when the unthinkable unintentional trajectories of life take over.