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## Context to the nugget

Bruce speaks about the three stages of a transition (the long goodbye, the messy middle and the new beginning). He goes on to say that each one of us has a super-power in one of these three and are likely to be good at coping with that stage of the transition.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And you talk about the three-step process in a transition, Bruce, the long goodbye that you spoke about, the messy middle and the new beginning. And what I found interesting was you go on to say that each one of us has a superpower to be effective in one of these three. Why so, and can you tell us a little bit about what makes this middle messy?

Bruce Feiler (RS): So, first of all the three stages. So, there are three stages to a life transition that in off itself is comforting to realize that there is a form to them. The first is the long goodbye, where we kind of confront the emotions that we are experiencing and say goodbye to the life that we are leaving behind. The next is the messy middle where we shed certain habits and create new ones. And then the last one is the new beginning where we sort of unveil our new selves and kind of update our personal story. And the way people have talked about, I mean, let's remember there hasn't been a major book on life transitions in 40 years. The last one was in the 70s and this idea of sort of life transitions was actually begun more than a century ago by a German anthropologist named Arnold van Gennep and everywhere people talk about, every writing about transitions in the first hundred years of psychology said that we must go through this process in a linear order. First, we say goodbye, then we like go through the wilderness and then we have a new beginning. If there's one definitive thing that I am prepared to say is that that's just flat wrong. In fact, we go through these phases in different orders. Like I don't even know that much about you, but you used to be a consultant. So, my guess is you are really good at the messy middle, right? You are probably very good at analyzing and making lists and like figuring out, like how you are going to get through it with multiple options. Like my guess is that that's your superpower like we are all good at one. But if that... by the way is that true, is that true?

DJ: Possible, because I have a lot of flying miles trying to make sense of complex situations and sort out complex ideas into simple... sort of make sense of complex ideas. So, you might possibly be right.

BF: Right, if that's the case then the odds would be that maybe the phase that you wouldn't be good at and I won't put you on the spot here would be the long goodbye right because that's confronting the messy emotions, right? That's accepting that you are afraid right or you are sad, right or you are ashamed by what's going on. Like maybe you are ashamed that you have lost your job or what you did when you drank too much or maybe you are fearful like how am I going to live without this job or

this status that I have become used to or maybe you are just sad like you realize, okay I have really grown as far as I can in this current job or this current business and I have got to move on to a new situation. And so, everybody is good at one of these phases and bad and I am like, that's okay. So, let's start where you are good, maybe you are good at making lists, maybe you are good at the emotion or maybe you are good at like, you know, reaching out to somebody else and asking for help. Let's start there, let's get confident because remember this process is going to take a while. So, let's start where we are good like get some momentum and then we can go back and deal with some of the phases that we are uncomfortable with. Because I will tell you this, going through a life transition is a very emotional experience and the emotions are going to affect you. So, if you try to pretend that you can get through it without that you are not really going to get through and you are going to find your own a new job in two years and you still haven't dealt with the emotional baggage that you feel and you are going to be feeling stuck again, So, dealing and confronting and surfacing these emotions is incredibly powerful, especially if that's not something that you naturally tend to do.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The biggest takeaway for me from this is that Transitions are not a step jump but an organic process. We need to give it the time for us to get the most out of it. I remember speaking with Herminia Ibarra (HI) of London Business School who has looked at Leadership Transitions in the Corporate world and has spent a lot of time researching transitions. I asked her, how long does it take for a successful leader in their 40s for instance to transition into a new space. This is what she said.

HI: *"3 Years, It's still 3 years, I mean I ask people all the time you know we have people here who are in the program that a 1 year program and they are hoping that will do the trick it never does in it's very frustrating because and honestly you know part of it is where does it start? When does the time frame actually start because there is also the bit of getting yourself to the point where you can start walking and so it's often a longer chunk than you think but it's if you think about extricating yourself, getting yourself to the point where we are actively looking for something else and then the looking and then the finding just exactly the right fit if you take time often between and you have taking on back to school in between it can be easily be 3 years and it's because people not gone hire you unless you have the experience because you don't have the network into that yet, you don't even have the language, you are still sorting it out for yourself. Experiment and learn takes a little bit longer and that's the hard part for people but that's often why they also go portfolio they start consulting us some of the old stuff just to make sure some money is coming in because you have got a continue life."*

DJ: I think her book Working Identity is a seminal piece of work when it comes to Transitions in the Corporate world. I would strongly recommend tuning into the conversation with her at the podcast. You can go to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com) and look up Herminia Ibarra in the Speakers section. In my work, I see too many people trying to move from Context A to Context B without giving some space for reflection and for possibilities to emerge. Herminia speaks about the notion of liminality where we need to embrace that period of identitylessness for a while and craft some experiments for the new possibilities to emerge and the reality is we cannot rush these things. You need to respect the emergent properties of a transition and not come at it with a linear mindset.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Herminia Ibarra that is referenced: [Pausing to reinvent](#).

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## Bruce Feiler - Nuggets

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## About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive’s / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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