

THE TALL WALL

Thriving as a new Partner

Making a confident and
successful transition



The TALLWALL

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Introduction

Most Partners talk about the transition into Partnership as one of the most significant in their careers. When on the cusp of Partnership, it may seem that not much will change. But in reality, there are subtle and overt differences that mean moving into the role represents a substantial shift. In the run up to Partnership, many candidates inevitably focus on securing the role. This can result in them paying less attention to what Partnership actually looks or feels like once achieved.

Typically, on stepping into Partnership, a number of immediate changes occur:

- New Partners move from being an employee to a business leader (or owner if they are an Equity Partner).
- Their perspective widens: they think about the whole firm and its direction.
- They are viewed differently by fellow Partners, clients and colleagues.
- Sometimes, their relationship with their sponsoring Partner recalibrates as they move from being a protégé to a potential competitor.
- Their presence and identity in the market, and within the firm, shifts.
- Their expectations of themselves, and the expectations the firm has of them, are higher.
- It is an exciting – and challenging – time.

What this guide is ... and isn't

As specialist coaches working with professional service firms, we know the value of supporting new Partners and encouraging them to thrive. The aim of this document is to provide observations and practical guidance for those transitioning into new Partner roles. We encourage the organisations that we work with to share these findings with new Partners as 'food for thought' throughout this transformative time.

Each Partner will embark on a unique journey and not everything in this guide will be relevant to them; we recognise that each person chooses to navigate and manage their career differently. The guide's questions and self-guided exercises are designed to help Partners reflect on their own situation and inform and support their decision-making.

This document does not set out how one 'should' manage one's career, nor is it a comprehensive guide covering every possible scenario that may be encountered. Instead, we have worked extensively with Partners on their individual journeys, using a variety of tools to help them to confidently and successfully transition through roles and stages. The guide and its content reflects this.

Let's talk about transitions

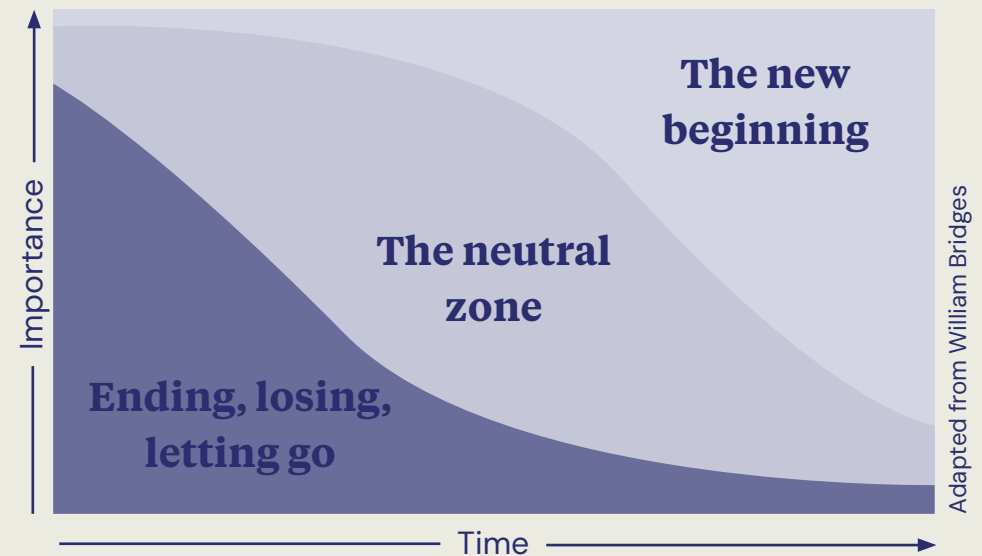
Change is situational. Transition is the psychological process that people go through to work through the change.

Before we move into the practical areas that you can utilise to support your transition, let's take a moment to understand the psychological process of transition. Understanding and noticing the way we react and adapt to change enables us to make sense of what we are experiencing and focus our energy on moving forward.

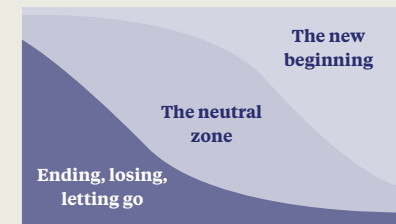
As a new Partner, the change you have experienced is the change in job title (and yes, some welcome benefits and entry to the Partnership 'club'). Transitioning into the Partner role to a point where you feel 'solid' and clear in both your identity and the path ahead is a process that will take time. The Bridges model demonstrates the three zones of psychological change.

"It isn't the changes that do you in.
It's the transitions."

WILLIAM BRIDGES



Ending, losing, letting go



This is the period of time when we disengage from our old identity and ways of working and acknowledge what is or will be lost.

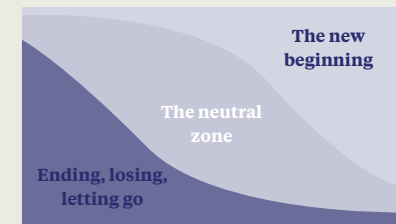
On the surface, when you move into a Partner role, it may seem that very little has 'ended' as you continue to work on your clients and have similar teams around you. This may be true to some extent, but psychologically, quite a lot has changed.

- You are now a Partner. This carries different weight for you, for your colleagues and your clients.
- You may find you have subtly different relationships with your old peers and colleagues.
- You may find that you are not included in the same networks or informal conversations that you were before.
- If you are an Equity Partner, you have ended your employee relationship with the firm to enter into a Partnership relationship.
- You may have to move away from some clients as the account may not need both you and the original Partner working on it.

As human beings, we are often uncomfortable about endings and prefer to move on quickly. Paying attention to what is 'ending' provides us with a solid psychological foundation to build on.

- **Q: What will be different for you?** What will you not take forward into your new role in the same way?
- **Q: How do you feel about this?** You may feel glad, bad, sad, or a mixture of the whole range of emotions. That is okay.

The neutral zone



This is the stage when you are in transition and looking to find your feet. It can be quite a turbulent phase, psychologically. Lots of things feel new; you haven't quite pinned down what you are doing; you are not quite 'solid' in how you feel about the role or what your new identity is. This stage can also represent a time of excitement and possibilities as the path ahead isn't quite clear or fixed. Equally, it can feel as if you are tumbling round in a imaginary washing machine and not quite knowing which way is up.

How this stage often plays out in Partner transitions:

- I don't really know the rules of the game as a Partner. I knew where I was previously.
- I am not sure how to inhabit the title of Partner now I have it. People are treating me differently, but I feel the same person I was before.
- It's not what I thought it would be like.
- Lots of doors are opening and I am not sure which ones to go through.
- The market is responding to me differently. It's great, but how do I make the 'right' decisions?
- I feel I have to give the Partner role everything and my family is getting very little of my time.

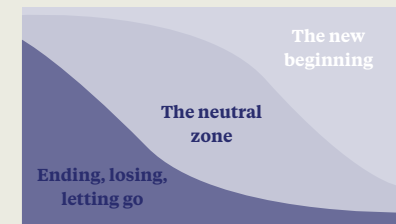
It's easy to say, "Don't worry, just give it time and you'll feel differently in a while". Yes, it is true that time (and experience) will support you to find your feet in the Partner role. But you can also consciously think about what can help you to move through transitions.

- **Q: What solid ground can you find in your role? What do you know?**
- **Q: What would help you to see 'the light at the end of the tunnel'?** What, in the past when you undertook role transitions, supported you to 'find your feet'?
- **Q: What opportunities are there in this 'unknowing' period?** How can you use this time as a new Partner to ask those seemingly-naive questions about the Partnership and how it works, to step into new territory and be bold?

The new beginning

In this stage, you have a sense of what you are stepping into, what your identity is. You may gain renewed energy and a sense of purpose.

As a new Partner, you already have an understanding of what your 'new beginning' is, because you have written your business case and talked about it during your Partner process. This means there is shape to this stage. As you move through your transition, you'll notice the shape sharpening into focus and being brought to life. Equally, given fluctuations in the market and the world in general (who could have predicted the Covid-19 pandemic?), it's reasonable to assume that the shape of your business case can and will change.



- **Q: How will you notice that you are 'living' your Partner case?** Once a month, test yourself on a scale of 1–10 and notice the progress you feel.
- **Q: Recall the first time you introduced yourself as a Partner and it felt 'right' (rather than odd).** When was that?
- **Q: Who do you see as your peer group?** When did this change to a group of Partners?

Everyone transitions in their own unique way, but everyone goes through these stages of transition psychologically. An awareness of this will support you and encourage you to be kind to yourself, and to allow yourself 'ups and downs' along the way. Importantly, it should help you to acknowledge when being a Partner feels like a 'solid' part of your identity.

Getting practical: support for your transition as a new Partner

Evidence suggests that individuals who transition well, and thrive in their first year as a Partner, pay particular attention to the areas below:

- Having a clear vision for what you want to achieve in your first 12 months (clients, revenues, types of work, relationships, networks)
- Having a strategy to support the vision
- Identifying the challenges in achieving your vision and finding ways to mitigate them

ROLE VISION & STRATEGY

RELATIONSHIPS & NETWORKS

- Re-aligning your relationships with your clients, your fellow Partners and your colleagues
- Being organisationally savvy (understanding and navigating politics)
- Consciously developing the networks you need for success

- Understanding your strengths, what will serve you well in your Partner role
- Understanding your values, what is important to you as a leader
- Understanding what you need to let go of or do less of in the Partner role
- Understanding what you need to develop further or spend more time on in the Partner role

PARTNER IDENTITY

PERSONAL WELLBEING

Knowing what you need to be mentally and physically well:

- Sleep
- Nutrition
- Physical fitness
- Mental fitness
- Supportive relationships
- A work life balance that works for you

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Which of these elements do you feel you do naturally in the course of your work? Which are you less likely to pay attention to?
- What would your sponsor say? Where might they see you focusing your energy more efficiently?
- What would your friends and family say? They may identify different areas of focus which would benefit you both.

Exercise to support your vision and strategy

Visualisation is a powerful technique which enables our minds to take us into the future and 'experience' our success. It's something that elite athletes do: imagining crossing the finish line first, executing a perfect gymnastic routine, jumping a clear round.

This visualisation facilitates clarity of mind, thought and action. Did you know that doing mental exercises can create new neural pathways in the same way that having real-life experiences can?

Visualisation is not just for athletes. It can benefit you too, as you embark on your first year as a Partner.

This is an invitation: 'go with' the guided visualisation exercise and reflect on it afterwards. Before you start, make sure:

- You are in a private space where you can move around the room.
- You have paper and pen to hand to jot down reflections.
- You will not be disturbed.
- Once you are ready, start the recording and go with the flow.

To undertake the exercise, please click the button to take you to the visualisation process.

ROLE VISION & STRATEGY

PARTNER IDENTITY

RELATIONSHIPS & NETWORKS

PERSONAL WELLBEING



Exercise to support your Partner identity

As we move upwards in our careers, our priorities and activities need to be reassessed. This can be a difficult shift if being highly utilised or 100% focused on client work has been the cornerstone of your working life.

As a Partner and a leader, your attention needs to be spread over a broader set of activities: winning new work; cultivating fruitful relationships; internal networking to expand the collective footprint with clients; coaching and developing your team; empowering our teams to deliver. The list goes on ...

With Partner eyes, complete the following table:

What are the main priorities of my role?	Where should I be spending my time?	What do I need to place value on 'doing'?
e.g: Building long term client relationships	Business development activities	Networking, dinners, catch-up calls/coffees, market scanning, brainstorming potential opportunities

Take a step back. Look at this critically:

What are you avoiding? What would a more experienced Partner say if you shared this with them? What do you need to be ruthless about to ensure you can 'live' your business case?

Once you have thoroughly considered the table above, ask yourself these questions:

- **Q:** What will I need to shift in my current focus or mindset to move towards this picture?
- **Q:** What do I need to let go of/ delegate/deprioritise?
- **Q:** What skills or strengths will I draw on to deliver my new remit?
- **Q:** What skills or capabilities will I need to develop further to deliver my new remit?



Exercise to support relationships and networks

Mapping your stakeholders is always a good use of your time. When you make any change, take on a new project or pick up a new responsibility, your stakeholders (in the broadest sense of the word) change. In relation to your new role, a stakeholder is anyone who may have an impact on your success in the role. They could be within your firm, within your family or within your market.

STEP 1. LIST YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

Make a list of all the people you think may have an impact on your success as a new Partner.

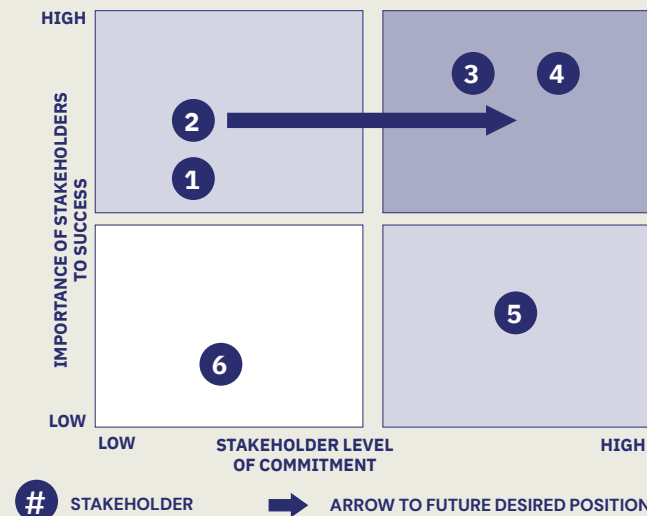
Consider the following to prompt further thoughts:

- Your competitors (external and internal)
- Key market influencers
- Your family: who is important in your life? Who has an impact on you being able to thrive in your role?
- Your team at work and those who will enact your vision.
- Your support structure at work: your PA or any other key central roles which provide you with resources or investments.

Finally, look at that list again. Who else might have an impact?

STEP 2. MAP YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

Make a list of all the people you think may have an impact on your success as a new Partner. Map your stakeholders using the diagram below, using the axis to guide where you place them. How important are they to your success? How committed are they to your success?



STEP 3: REFLECTION AND ACTION PLAN

As you look at the picture, draw arrows to relocate the people you need to move across the map in order to enhance your success.

Consider which critical relationships you need to proactively deepen. Create an action plan for next steps (just as you would for a client relationship).

Exercise to support your wellbeing

We are all familiar with the concept of having a well-balanced diet to support our nutrition. Taking this concept further, Dr Daniel J Siegel and David Rock utilised neurobiological research to identify the various 'ingredients' that our minds need for healthy functioning. Siegel and Rock regard these as "daily essential mental nutrients" and designed the The Healthy Mind Platter below.



Focus time: When we closely focus on tasks in a goal-orientated way, we take on challenges that make deep connections in the brain.

Play time: When we allow ourselves to be spontaneous or creative, playfully enjoying novel experiences, we help make new connections in the brain.

Connecting time: When we connect with other people, ideally in person, and when we take time to appreciate our connection to the natural world around us, we activate and reinforce the brain's relational circuitry.

Physical time: When we move our bodies, aerobically if medically possible, we strengthen the brain in many ways.

Time in: When we quietly reflect internally, focusing on sensations, images, feelings and thoughts, we help to better integrate the brain.

Down time: When we are non-focused, without any specific goal, and let our mind wander or simply relax, we help the brain recharge. This is not sleep time, it is awake down time.

REFLECTIVE EXERCISE

- Keep a diary for at least two weeks and include weekends.
- Take 10 minutes at the end of the day to note down the amount of time you feel you spent in each area.
- When keeping your diary, reflect on and note which activities you place in each category.
- At the end of each week, note where your attention has been drawn. Record the elements of mental activity you most undertake and the areas where your brain may be being under-nourished.
- Consider actions you will take to ensure your mind has optimum nourishment.

Further reading

Act like a Leader; Think like a Leader by Herminia Ibarra, Harvard Business Review, 2015

Managing Transitions by William Bridges and Susan Bridges, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2017

To Sell is Human by Daniel H Pink, CanonGate, 2013

Gravitas by Caroline Goyder, Vermillion, 2014

Radical Candor by Kim Scott, Pan, 2017

Leading Professionals by Laura Empson, Oxford University Press, 2017

Your Brain at Work by David Rock, Harper Business, 2009

Emotional Agility by Susan David, Penguin, 2016

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