



Gestalt International Study Center Newsletter

Focus on: Transitions

Number 1, February 2007

Welcome!

We're going to focus on a different theme in each issue of our GISC Newsletter. For this issue we chose **transitions**, since that is what we are experiencing here in Wellfleet. We share our GISC transition and introduce the first thirty days in the words of **Nancy Hardaway** - our new President; focus on a new book on executive transitions co-authored by one of our Leadership Program faculty, **Bridget Farrands**; and take a look at personal transitions from the experience of one of our Next Phase faculty, **Katherine Greenleaf**. We hope you find something valuable, and invite you to share ideas for future issues.

Changes at GISC

We've chosen transition as our theme since that is what we are experiencing, with our new President and CEO Nancy Hardaway joining Edwin and Sonia Nevis in Wellfleet to help nurture the work of GISC. Nancy's educational background and career as an entrepreneur, financial executive, and strategic consultant will complement our existing team. Some of you already know her from her ongoing work at the Center over the past three years.

Special Announcement:

We want to share with you a very important step that we have taken to insure the strength and longevity of GISC. In a strategic planning meeting of the Board of Directors and Program Leaders in March 2006, it was decided to support the growth of GISC by adding a new executive position to the Center's management structure. We are delighted to announce that Nancy Hardaway has agreed to serve in the role of President and CEO effective January 1, 2007. Nancy has been our business development consultant for the last three years, has served on the Board of Directors, and has been a participant in all of our major programs and many of our workshops. In her new role she will be leading the business and growth strategy of the Center and will be responsible for the administration of our programs. She brings to the role a solid business background with years of success as an entrepreneur who founded and sold two companies focused on sales and construction, corporate experience as an executive officer in the financial industry, and, most recently, strategic growth consulting and executive coaching. Coming to GISC returns Nancy full circle back to her early educational roots, with an undergraduate degree from Tufts University in Psychology and a graduate degree from Harvard University School of Education in Learning Theory. Nancy possesses a warm and generous spirit, and a great deal of passion for the work of the Center and for expanding our impact in the world.



Nancy Hardaway

Edwin Nevis will continue as Chairman of the Board, will direct GISC's international programs, and will continue to teach in our Leadership Program and select workshops. Sonia March Nevis is taking on the newly created role of Dean of the Faculty and will coordinate teaching and staff development, as well as continuing to teach in the Cape Cod Training Program (which some of you knew in the past as the Couple and Family or Intimate Systems Program). To give Sonia time for her new role, Joe Melnick and Penny Backman, long-time CCTP faculty, have become co-chairs of that program.

Arlene Kirsch, M.S., M.P.A., is now almost one year into her role as Administrative Manager. She brings extensive expertise to the Center having been a licensed therapist, organization coach for non-profits, fund-raiser, and executive for thirty years. Cynthia Cook will continue in her new role as Communications Coordinator, where her knowledge of our work from having been the Center's Office Manager for five years, and a practicing Gestalt therapist for twenty-five years, serves her well.

We are excited about these changes and hope you feel our energy and enthusiasm about our future.

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Leader's Log: Embarking on a Great Adventure

*Finding her role in relation to the Nevises and the larger GISC community, and balancing it with the daily tasks of her new position has been the challenge of Nancy Hardaway's first month in her new office. She'll be learning as she goes and will share the process with you as a case study of our transition, with both intimate and strategic moments. Read musings from Nancy Hardaway's first month in our **Leader's Log**.*

Leader's Log by Nancy Hardaway

Day 1: Despite all the times I've walked through the doors of the Meeting House in Wellfleet as a student, a consultant, and a Board member, it felt different to be using my key and walking into my office today as President and CEO. It's the first time I've ever been in the building all alone. It's weightier. And humbling. I wasn't alone long. Edwin brought me coffee and said "you're about to embark on a great adventure, Nancy." During the transitional days I'd spent with the Nevises late last year, I'd been aware that the sense of pride and excitement at the organization I was joining and the role I might play was growing even stronger. Edwin and Sonia shared specific content – GISC's history and their history, the balance sheet and profit and loss. They shared their dreams for GISC's growth and its potential for impact on individuals, organizations and our society. They shared process – how to work effectively with people in the office and faculty, the importance of finding a balance between community looseness and a business-like organization.

Now I face a set of specific performance goals we've developed together. I am charged with looking at the organization as a whole, the integration of all the pieces that reflect the interests and expertise of not only Edwin and Sonia, but the larger community of faculty and students; to continue the quality of our programs and offer ways for students to sample us for the first time, to study seriously, to have opportunity for advanced learning; and to support the exploration and development of new concepts. I also have a broader goal of helping to define the identity of GISC as it grows into the future, and occasional ripples of self-doubt mix in with the excitement. It's a complex question, speaking directly to GISC's stage of organizational development, beyond our first founder stage. I can't help wondering whether I'm the right person, whether there is a right person.

Day 5: I'm trying to slow myself down, respecting the wisdom and integrity that has created this Center. To listen and move slowly takes conscious awareness; with my entrepreneurial background I know I like to take action, to be decisive. In *Lost In Transition* by Elsner and Farrands (see elsewhere in this newsletter), I am reassured as I read of their research in executive transitions that blast the myth of the first 100 days as a time to take action and set direction, finding instead that "succeeding with transition is a lot more than knowing things and people. It is about arriving fully in the new context (with all the adaptation and getting-of-bearings required) and then developing the inner stability and sense of direction to survive." Am I taking the time to fully arrive when I haven't even put a thing in my desk yet?

Day 11: It's easy to accomplish the tasks, the contract writing for new programs, budget setting, putting finishing touches on the *Women in the World* workshop with Sonia and Deb Stewart, and working with Joe Melnick on our workshop on conflict. It's harder to stay focused on the big picture, to know what's important each day, not just urgent. I remember a comment of Sonia's that I'd noted in my journal during one of the first classes I'd had with her. "You have to come to terms with the fact that there is always more to do these days than you have time or energy to accomplish."

Day 15: After these first several weeks, I feel like a sponge, saturated with assimilating, particularly with days filled as we try to accomplish a month of work in the weeks before Edwin and Sonia leave for South Africa to teach the Cape Cod Training Program. I spend the weekend too weary to do anything and am reminded of a quote I'd read recently about scientists traveling into a remote area with native guides. After several long days of fast progress, a morning comes when the guides refuse to leave the campsite and explain that they are waiting for their souls to catch up. Can I give myself time, both this weekend and in the months ahead?

Day 20: I'm struck with the fact that our organization of faculty and learners is in essence a volunteer community, drawn by the good theory and practice, the positive impact of the experiential learning on personal and professional life, drawn by the curiosity, wisdom and generosity that Edwin and Sonia embody and have somehow infused into the faculty and seemingly into the air of the building itself. How can I learn more of this community that is spread over the world? I commit myself to finding ways to make contact, to "walk the halls" and "visit the branches" as I did when I took on an executive role in a financial company with 38 locations.

Day 28: Everything is still on top of my desk and not in my desk, but there's a lot in my head, and lots of notes in my notebook. I focus on asking questions and listening carefully, without trying to find a "figure" in the field too soon. Our transition at GISC isn't one of transfer of leadership but addition to leadership; however, it does involve the sensitivity of succession planning, even if years from now. It's hard to think about and to talk about. But the fact that GISC has taken this step toward sustainability into the future keeps it from being unsaid, and having it said frees up energy to make a good transition.

Leader's Log, continued

Day 30: Our community is large so it will be hard for me to meet each one of you, but I hope we can make this a joint venture; that you'll be willing to write or call with your own ideas of what GISCS means to you now and what you want it to be in the future. If you'd like to respond to these musings, you can email me at nhardaway@gisc.org or call the office. Perhaps we can include some of your thoughts in future newsletters.

On a personal note: I'm 54, married for 10 years to my second husband, Larry Peterson, a residential builder. I have 2 children from my first marriage, a daughter, Krista, who is 2 years out of Williams College, working in Washington DC doing health care policy research, and Trevor, who is a sophomore at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA, interested in physics and sculpture. Larry has one son, Cody, a vegan environmentalist who installs solar heating, plays and builds guitars, and sometimes works for Larry. We live in on Cape Cod with a dog and 2 cats. I like to play golf and hope to play with Edwin sometime, paint, write, play piano badly, ski, hike, rock climb indoors. I hate heights and am allergic to dairy products. I love what I'm doing!

Lost in Transition: A New Model for Executives

Lost in Transition presents a new model for successful executive transition. Co-authored by our Leadership faculty co-chair Bridget Farrands and her partner Richard Elsner, the book is based on extensive research and reflects the authors' Gestalt training. They debunk the popular "100 days of change," finding in their research that leaders underperform in the first six months, largely because they are given too little time to learn and too much pressure to rush into decisions. **Lost in Transition: How Business Leaders Can Successfully Take Charge in New Roles** is available from GISCS.

A LONELY LIFE by Alison Clements, excerpted from *Retail Week*, September 1, 2006

Talented executives need to be given adequate support as they take on new leadership roles.

Landing your dream executive job takes some doing. You spend years gaining experience and building an industry reputation that will wow employers. When a top job opportunity comes up, you do your utmost to convince the panel that you're an energetic achiever, you can hit the ground running and orchestrate strategic change that will deliver fantastic results. "But, all too often, senior managers and executives who are parachuted into new posts or promoted internally spend the first few months feeling confused, bewildered, alone and with no real understanding of what is expected of them," says chair of coaching consultancy The Turning Point, Bridget Farrands. "Suddenly, they are responsible for hundreds or even thousands of people. They're faced with Herculean tasks, full diaries, constant interruptions and, very often, no one to talk to," she says. Farrands, who worked for Boots for seven years, and fellow consultant Richard Elsner are co-authors of a new book on what happens when leaders embark on top jobs. Called *Lost in Transition: How Business Leaders Can Successfully Take Charge in New Roles*, the book is based on research into the experiences of leaders across many different business sectors.

Overwhelmingly, the authors found that leaders struggled to cope in new top jobs, were unsupported by the organisations that had hired them and, because of the nature of executive management – particularly City or private equity pressure – felt obliged to forge ahead blindly, feigning a bullish confidence, which, in many cases, had withered on day one of the job. "Many executives underperform or fail in the first six months of their role, largely because they are given too little time to learn about the company, the culture, what is required in the job and, crucially, what kind of person they are," says Farrands. "There is a tendency to rush into decision-making too early, often without adopting the right psychological approach needed to do it. All too often, mistakes are made." Meanwhile, bosses who have hired the talent typically step back – not wanting to crowd the pitch – rather than acting as a mentor, says Farrands. One retailer who took a divisional directorship in a leading high street chain says she felt isolated, because her immediate boss barely communicated with her. "I reached point where I was feeling out of my depth, but help wasn't forthcoming," she says. "The culture was very much 'sort it out yourself', but, with some discussion and guidance, I would have delivered much better results."

Farrands and Elsner argue that retailers hoping to get the most out of their talented directors need to spend more time and effort on a process that has been dubbed onboarding in the US. Onboarding is not solely about meeting the practical needs of a new employee, giving them a company induction and providing relevant training; it also takes into account the psychological impact that shouldering new responsibilities will have on the individual. "The key to success for incoming leaders is not to hit the ground running, but to spend time thinking, reflecting, watching, listening and asking questions," argues Farrands. "It's about deciding what kind of person you are going to be. Rushing in, proving what a great dynamo you are and doing things too fast is a recipe for disaster," she says.

Giving time and support sounds simple, yet it is rare in practice. "Companies need to shift their mindset on this," says Farrands. "Executive coaching can help, but it can't be the sole solution. Patience and support from the top is required too. A successful person comes as a bundle that should contain confidence and self esteem, as well as practical skills and intelligence. If you lose the psychological strength and self belief, you aren't getting all you originally paid for. And, as we all know, executive directors don't come cheap."

Personal Transitions: Good Endings Make Good Beginnings by Katherine Greenleaf

Good personal transitions, whether chosen or thrust upon us, start with good endings. Making a good ending, and finding support for a new beginning, brings us out of the isolation that transitions can evoke. Our research shows that reflecting on previous life decisions provides confidence in moving forward. Katherine Greenleaf, co-chair of our Next Phase program on transitions, shares insights she has both taught and learned from participants and from her own personal transition.

We teach the course we need to take-- and so I came to be the co-leader of the Next Phase program for the past three years. In a four day course adults, typically in their late forties, fifties and older, assess and articulate who they want to be and do in the next phase of their life develop transition strategies to move forward. While every participant is unique, common themes, challenges and effective strategies in times of transitions emerge as the participants share their life experience.

Transitions start with endings and good endings make for good beginnings. Endings are hard--sometimes quick, sometimes slow but generally accompanied by initial denial and resistance which is seen clearly only in retrospect. As participants tell their stories many comment that they now see how they had outgrown a particular job or relationship but didn't see it at the time. Endings and beginnings take a great deal of energy and the more a person is able to focus his time and energy on ending "well" i.e. deliberately and cleanly, the easier it is to gather and maintain one's energy for a new path.

Transitions create a sense of isolation. People frequently feel "alone" or "unique" in facing a change. Specific issues and circumstances unique to an individual mask the fact that the experience of isolation is common. People get stuck in a repetitive soliloquy that echoes in their head further creating a sense of being alone. Isolation is an enemy, which is most effectively counter acted by dialogue with someone else. Dialogue is not about advice; it is about exchange with another. Repeatedly I have seen participants voice for the first time their thoughts regarding a transition and have seen how simply saying something out loud paved the way for new thinking and support.

Transition creates a sense of disorientation that can undermine a sense of competence when you need it the most. Many people come to the Next Phase program feeling intimidated or overwhelmed by a transition they face or have "kept themselves confused," afraid to acknowledge their desires. People are asked to explore a good life decision they made in the past and discuss with another person how they approached it. We share the results of a Gestalt Life Study Group that illustrates that the content of the decision is usually quite different, but an individual's process for making effective decisions and acting on them has its own signature unique to each person. The more awareness a person has of what has been a successful process

for them in the past, the more confidently they approach change in unfamiliar territory. Transitions are initiated by decisions but are built and sustained by resources and support. As people open up to the types of transitions they want to make, the degree to which they can identify and marshal resources and support —information, emotional support, experts who can help them—the more likely they are to actually build the life they want. Underestimating the need to clearly identify, ask for and get support in a variety of areas sabotages our best efforts. Every moment spent realistically marshaling resources to sustain positive change increases the likelihood of success.

Transitions release pent up creative energy and optimism and energy begets energy. Even unwelcome transitions, when faced squarely, release a tremendous amount of creativity and positive

feeling. As the workshop progresses you can feel the energy building as people step squarely into the changes they want to make. In simply articulating what they want and need, the energy and confidence that they can find the necessary resources and help solidifies. Peoples' entire demeanor becomes more lively and energetic—they are moving and the momentum carries them over difficulties.

So in keeping with 'teaching the course I need to take'—I have been conducting my own personal laboratory in transition. During an early Next Phase program I articulated the goal of "reinventing" my life when I was young enough to have the energy for new adventures and old enough to have the resources. I became clear that I did not "know" what I wanted to begin but that "finishing well" a phase in which I had invested much of my adult life—my job-- was critical and it would take a great deal of energy to accomplish. I didn't want to carry heavy baggage on my next journey. I mentioned my goal to several close friends who cheerfully agreed it was a great idea but it would be a cold day in hell before I would do it.... and in they were right. My resolve dissolved frequently, but then it was time for another class of the Next Phase and I was again immersed in and awed by others stories. Their stories gave me courage and when courage failed me, life provided both wonderful experiences to entice me forward and very difficult and painful kicks in the butt to jolt me forward. I did make the leap, and I did "finish" well. Now its on to "beginnings".... my own next phase.

The Next Phase is being held again on May 3 - 6.



Katherine Greenleaf (r) and other Next Phase participants

Coming Up at GISC For details visit our website: www.gisc.org

New Programs: *Women in the World • Executive Personality Dynamics for Coaches • Confronting Executive Challenges*

Returning Favorites: *Couples Workshop • Roots III: Social Change - Gestalt Perspectives & Practices • The Next Phase*