




EMBRACING CHANGE

An introduction to personal change management for the K-12 educator. Critically examining and embracing change is an important skill for all educators in the 21st century.

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 Version 1.0

REQUEST TRAINING

For additional help with change management, contact a TIE representative. We can provide training on ed tech, student-centered learning, and more for school districts.

GET CREDIT

You may be able to get credit for this work by participating in TIE's online courses & pathways. Go to the website listed above to sign up for graduate credit opportunities.

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*In the fall, my ego needed sleep;
He sat up nights composing poems I could not keep.
My strong root is when the quiet reveals my voice;
My strong root is when stillness makes my choice;
My strong root is at the bottom of this hand-dug well;
How far the bucket has to drop? I cannot tell.
I cannot tell.*

*The winter came and the snow began to fall;
I built no shelter, had no covering at all.
I am unveiling something ancient inside;
I am uncovering all I've tried to hide;
I give up speaking for listening;
The wisdom's in the air—it's glistening.
It's glistening.*

*In the spring, the horses roll and play;
They sun their bellies, they upend an April day.
I'll place the earth beneath my head;
Of mud and early grass I'll make my bed;
I'll show my teeth and snort at the sky;
Can't you see the idea of summer in these wild mustang eyes?
Mustang eyes...*

["Deepen the Well"](#) by Scott Simpson

Overview

Welcome to TIE's *Embracing Change*. This may be available as both a shareable PDF and through the TIE LMS. The shareable PDF is under a CC BY-NC-ND license. Any online course version may be completed as a part of different courses for graduate credit such as "Embracing Change: Blended Learning" or "Embracing Change: PCBE" if the documented workshop totals at least 15 hours. The PDF on its own may not be completed for credit. Consult with a TIE Learning Specialist beforehand for further information.

Contents

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Outcomes & Success Criteria

This has two primary outcomes and several sub-outcomes or success criteria. Success criteria are small goals that should be able to be met by the end of their corresponding section. You can use them as self-assessments: if you feel that you have met the success criteria, move on; if you have not met the success criteria, review the section, explore any additional materials, and reach out for help.

- I can embrace changes in education.
 - I can define change.
 - I can reflect on my experiences during change.
 - I can categorize change across multiple dimensions.
 - I can use various strategies to respond to change positively.
 - I can identify current changes in education.
- I can trace how one goes through transition during change.
 - I can differentiate between transition and change.
 - I can identify the characteristics of endings.
 - I can identify the characteristics of neutral zones.
 - I can identify the characteristics of new beginnings.



Annotating This Document

Throughout this document, additional space is left in the margins to take notes. We encourage you to record your comments, questions, and connections as you read. Change is a broad topic and frequent reflection is an important tool for embracing change.

Minimum Time Estimates

You can anticipate spending a minimum of time for each part of this document:

- Reading through the document - 15 minutes
- Annotating this document - 2 hours
- Completing all “try this!” activities - 2 hours
- Completing the two self-assessments - 4 hours
- Exploring all of the linked resources - 4 hours
- Using the reflective journal - 2 hours and 45 minutes
 - 15 minutes per entry x 11 entries

Keep in mind that these are estimates of the minimum amount of time. Depending on the type of change and the time available, additional journal entries may be made. Additionally, these journal entries may be spaced out to occur every day, once per week, or once per month as necessary. To complete everything in the list of time estimates above, you will need at least 15 hours.

Given all of that, *at least three hours* should be allocated to read through this document and complete nine reflective journal entries on change & transition.



Outer Change

Outcome: I can embrace changes in education.

Education is full of changes. Whether it was the temporary move to remote learning in 2020, the adoption of a new reading curriculum, or individual teachers experimenting with STEM integration, all educators experience change.

Embracing change does not mean enjoying change or simply following educational trends unquestioningly. Embracing change is the act of accepting that change can and will happen and that as educators, we should try to make the most of it, both for ourselves and our students.

"Try this!" Activity

Take a moment to reflect on how you feel about the concept of change. What comes to mind when you hear "change" and "embracing change?" Why is that?

A large, light blue rounded rectangle with rounded corners, intended for student reflection. It is positioned below the activity prompt and is empty, providing space for the student to write their thoughts.

What is Change?

Annotations

Success Criteria: I can define change.

Change is something that everyone faces. While the primary focus of this text is change in K-12 education, change can only be understood in the broader context. Changing from a traditional classroom to a student-centered environment can be as shocking to the psyche as moving to a new state. Change is never easy. However, we can better make the most of any change by understanding the nature of change. Strategies for personal change will also apply to changes in K-12 education.

Change occurs anytime a person, situation, or thing is different from it was before. By this definition, change is constantly occurring. A more practical definition for our purposes is that change occurs anytime a person, situation, or thing is *noticeably* different from what it was before.

Examples of change are

- A promotion
- Moving to a new state
- Trying PBL in your classroom
- The death of a pet
- The forced adoption of a new curriculum
- A new app/invention takes hold
- Starting a new hobby
- School closures



Certainly, we all change slightly from day to day, but it is hardly noticeable. Meanwhile, the change from teenager to adult or from a traditional grade book to competency-based grading is noticeable and thus provides us with an opportunity to respond by embracing or rejecting change.

"Try this!" Activity

Make a list of the changes that you have gone through recently. What change was most impactful on your life and/or on your practice?

Reflecting on Change

Annotations

Success Criteria: I can reflect on my experiences during change.

The first and most important step in responding to all types of change is reflection. Without critically reflecting on our own feelings and mental models, we cannot understand change. Moreover, we may miss entire changes occurring around us if we do not take time to slow down.

“We know the world only through the window of our mind. When our mind is noisy, the world is as well. And when our mind is peaceful, the world is, too. Knowing our minds is just as important as trying to change the world.”

— Haemin Sunim

This reflection on our own thinking, metacognition, is something that many are already familiar with. After all, part of the Danielson Framework for Teaching is “4a. Engaging in Reflective Practice” and this includes reflection by a teacher on “their own beliefs, mindsets, and aspects of their own identities that may influence the experience of students” ([The Danielson Group, 2022](#)).



Additionally, many teachers are already familiar with the power of self-reflection for their students; Visible Learning MetaX identifies self-judgment and reflection as having an effect size of .75 or as having the “potential to considerably accelerate” student achievement ([Visible Learning MetaX, 2021](#)).

Beyond that, many people already practice some form of reflection such as

- Journaling
- Mediation
- Prayer
- Mood Tracking Apps
- Going for a Walk / Exercising

While exploring the topic of change, we encourage you to reflect deeply and often in the form of notes. These notes can include connections, reactions, questions, sketches, and more. For example, how are you feeling right now? Why do you think you feel that way?

"When you record your experience, you slow down and force yourself to put things into words. And out of the blur of your experience, shapes start to emerge. Don't let yourself be carried away with expectations of what you'll find. Once when I was doing this myself, I found I was so busy waiting for an answer to the question I thought my life was asking that I was missing the inner experience of my mind's cranking out 'answer' after 'answer' in hopes of giving me what I wanted--or thought I wanted. You may find, as I did, that the neutral zone's gift to you is a ringside seat where you can watch your own mind making up realities. Once you've had that experience, you will find it harder to take yourself and your sufferings quite so seriously ever again.

— William Bridges

Types of Change

Annotations

Success Criteria: I can categorize change across multiple dimensions.

To better understand change, it can be useful to categorize change. By identifying the type of change that we are experiencing, we can better reflect on our own experiences and explore specific suggestions for responding.

We can map any change across four dimensions. As you explore these, remember that change may not always fit so neatly into a category and that change may be experienced differently by different people. The first three dimensions are experienced by almost everyone:

- **Personal vs Professional** - While our work life affects and is affected by our personal life, the two are separate. An example of personal change may be a change in political or religious beliefs in your family. An example of a professional change is a new series of features in Google Docs that you want to learn.
- **Individual vs Group** - In both our personal and professional lives, change can occur individually or as part of a group. A person who is promoted to a new role in a new office is going through an individual change. A team who gets a new manager is going through a group change. When experiencing group change, make sure to take time to reflect on the change on your own as well and not always with a group.



- **Voluntary vs Involuntary** - Voluntary changes are often easier than involuntary changes. An involuntary change may be a disease or illness. A voluntary change may be the decision to return to school. Involuntary changes are more draining than voluntary changes. Common strategies for involuntary change include 1) placing an emphasis on gratitude, and 2) labeling what is in your control and out of your control while actively choosing to pursue what is in your control. Consider exploring [HeartMath](#) when dealing with involuntary changes.

The final dimension is far more dependent on your workplace and workplace culture.

- **Singular vs Evolving** - Singular changes occur once and are largely stable. A new computer lab is an example of a singular change. Evolving changes are situations that unfold in real-time. This may be a new educational strategy being piloted. Singular changes are the more common type of change, but evolving changes may be the norm in [complex environments](#) or in cultures of iteration & innovation. If your school uses [The Fifth Discipline](#) ideas, it is likely that change is evolving for you. If your superior subscribes to ["Theory Y,"](#) it is also likely your changes will be evolving. Evolving changes are often more draining than singular changes. If you find yourself often at the center of evolving changes, consider exploring [Impact Players by Liz Wiseman](#).

*All that you touch
You Change.*

*All that you change
Changes you.*

*The only lasting truth
is Change"*

- Octavia Butler

Strategies for Responding to Change

Annotations

Success Criteria: I can use various strategies to respond to change positively.

While the type of change will play a role in what strategies you can use when responding to change, there are still some universal strategies to help cope with and embrace change.

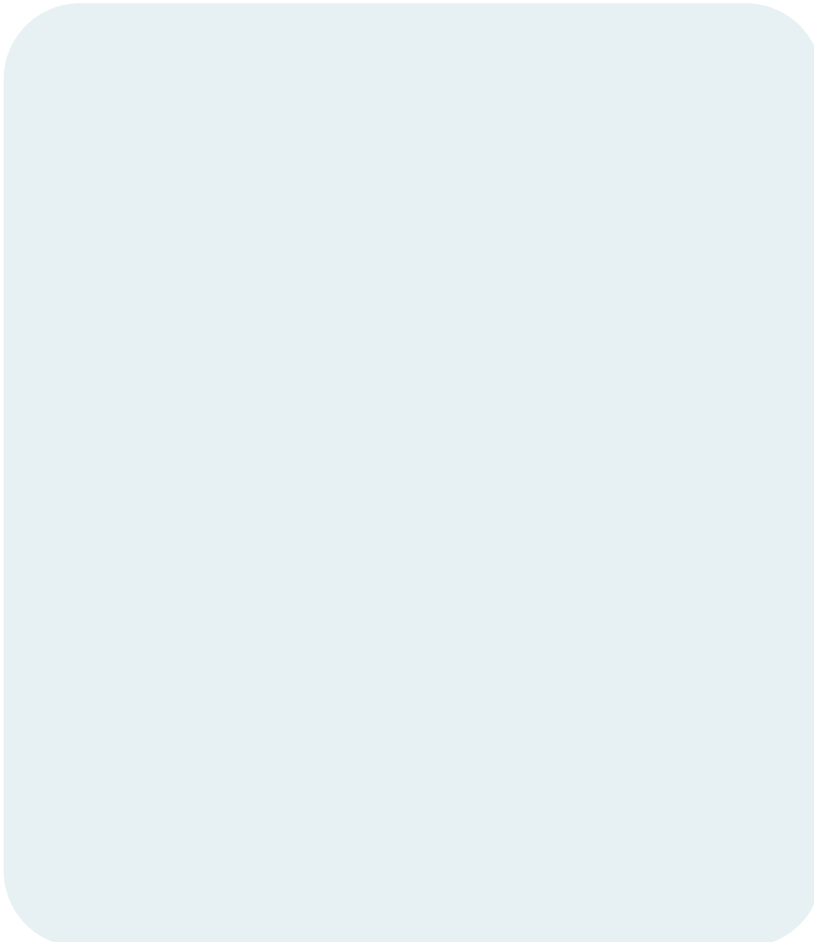
Many of these are adapted from therapy tools:

- **Reframing** - Reframing is about viewing something (in this case, the change) in a new, more positive way. Rather than denying the difficult aspects of the change, it is about taking a more complete view. To reframe the change, consider asking yourself the following:
 - Could this change be seen differently?
 - How can I grow from this experience?
 - (If seemingly negative) why else might this change have occurred?
- **Visualization** - Visualization is a broad set of strategies where you imagine a more positive, relaxing mental image. This may be a visualization of the future if all goes well or a special moment in the past. Visualizing the future can make it more tangible while visualizing the past can help calm you. When experiencing change, visualization can be used to temporarily extract yourself from the situation if it is too draining. Some find guided imagery especially helpful.
- **Gratitude** - Gratitude is the simple practice of focusing on things that you are grateful for. These things can be small things such as a cup of coffee or nice weather. Gratitude can be incorporated into other strategies or done independently.
- **Affirmations** - Affirmations are short, positive statements that typically begin with "I am.." Writing out these affirmations and repeating them can be helpful if you find yourself stuck in a prior way of thinking.

- **Rational Analysis** - Similar to reframing, rational analysis is about questioning and disputing your underlying assumptions. This approach is based on the idea that our beliefs are not always rational. If you catch yourself saying things like "I could never teach that way" or "I'm always going to be bad with technology," that is a good sign that you are subscribing to irrational beliefs. To dispute these beliefs, focus on being specific and objective: Try saying "I don't have much experience with Google Doc's Smart Chips feature" rather than "I'm always going to be bad with technology."

"Try this!" Activity

Try one of the strategies above. If you need more detail on any strategy, feel free to search for instructions online. After, record your experiences with the strategy.



Current Changes in Education

Annotations

Success Criteria: I can identify current changes in education.

There are many changes to be aware of in the educational landscape. Most of these changes began decades ago and are only now gaining traction. The overall trend in education is a movement from traditional, teacher-centered practices to student-centered practices. As a part of this, the role of the educator is changing from the “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side.” This change can be especially tough for educators who have spent a large portion of their practice in the former role.

Some other current trends in education are listed below.

- New & Reemerging Educational Strategies
 - [Blended Learning](#)
 - [Project-Based Learning](#)
 - [Game-Based Learning](#)
 - [Competency-Based Learning](#)
 - [Personalized Learning](#)
 - [Mass Customized Learning](#)
 - [Microlearning](#)



Annotations

- Increased Emphasis on Certain Topics
 - Student's Experiences and Feelings
 - [21st Century Skills](#)
 - [Digital Citizenship](#)
 - Computer Science & [STEM](#)
- Changes in Society & Students
 - [Access to Smartphones and the Internet](#)
 - [Demographic Changes](#)

NOTE: For each, a number of links are provided to help you learn more about them. Just because something is listed above does not necessarily mean that TIE encourages or discourages the change. Wikipedia links are used when possible for their neutral perspective.

"Try this!" Activity

What change do you think will impact you the most? Why is that?



Change Self-Assessment

Annotations

Before moving on, take this opportunity to assess yourself on the outcome and paired success criteria.

- I can embrace changes in education.
 - I can define change.
 - I can reflect on my experiences during change.
 - I can categorize change across multiple dimensions.
 - I can use various strategies to respond to change positively.
 - I can identify current changes in education.

You can do this by examining a change that you have gone through in the past. This change can be related to K-12 education but does not have to be. In the form of a couple of paragraphs, a slide deck, video, or another medium:

1. Describe the change.
2. Describe how you reacted to the change.
3. Categorize the change using the dimensions listed in “Types of Change.”
4. Identify at least one strategy that did or might have helped with the change.

Inner Transition

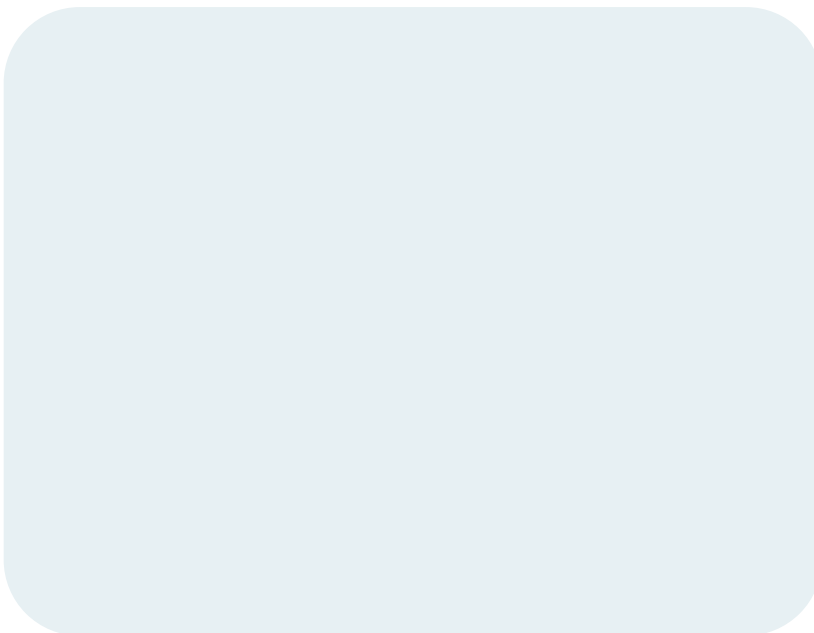
Outcome: I can trace how one goes through transition during change.

Change is not simply external. Along with every outer change, internal processing occurs. Too often, this internal process, transition, is ignored. However, this is where change, if it is to take hold, takes hold.

This internal process goes at its own pace, but we can be assured that it will eventually come to pass if we see it through. An apt analogy to this process is the changing seasons. While the yellowing leaves and empty branches of Fall and Winter may seem gloomy, we know that we can weather it as Spring and Summer are on the horizon. Just as we have faith that the sun will return in the morning, we need faith that we can make it from our old state of being to a new one.

"Try this!" Activity

See if you can come up with another analogy to describe this process. If you are having a tough time, continue on and return to this activity when you are ready.



Change vs Transition

Annotations

Success Criteria: I can differentiate between transition and change.

So far, we have explored change, the types of change, and strategies for embracing different types of change. What we have not discussed are the steps that occur in an individual during and after a change. We call this inner process transition: change is external; transition is internal.

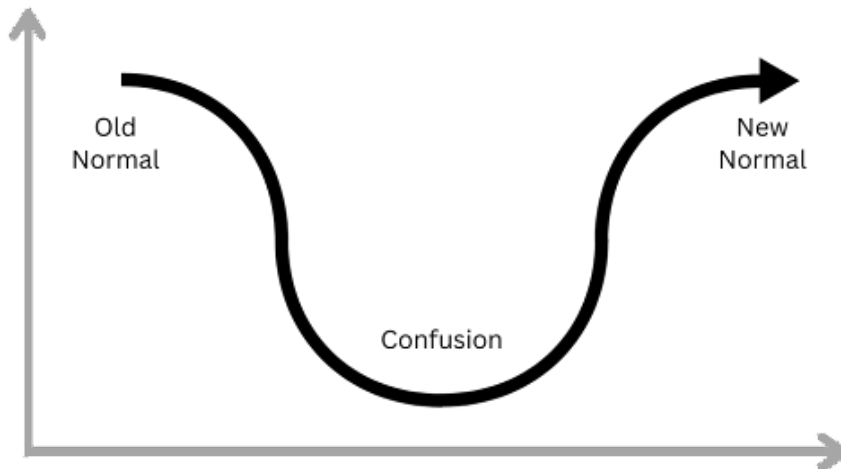
“The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.”

— Albert Einstein

Different theories and models exist about the phases of transition. The most famous of these is the five stages of grief as articulated by Kubler-Ross:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

These stages are expanded upon by Adam, Hayes, and Hopson's change curve as well as Virginia Satir's model and in Schein's Elaboration of Lewin's Model. All these theories begin with a status quo (before the change), a period of inner turmoil (during or after the change), and a new status quo (after the change). Another constant across all of these models is a dip during the period of inner turmoil/confusion (in self-esteem, performance, or another metric). In this way, a universal model may look like this:



As you may have noticed, transition has plenty of connections to the science of learning. There is an initial mental model, some external stimuli (the change), a period of exploration and confusion, followed by an updated mental model. Just like in learning, we have to wrestle with ideas in that center space before we can emerge anew.

This three-phase model of transition is best articulated by William Bridges in *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*. Bridge describes these phases as

- The Ending
- The Neutral Zone
- The New Beginning

Here, we will use Bridges terminology for transition but combine it with advice from other models where appropriate for changes in K-12.

Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life"

— Peter M. Senge

Phase 1: The Ending

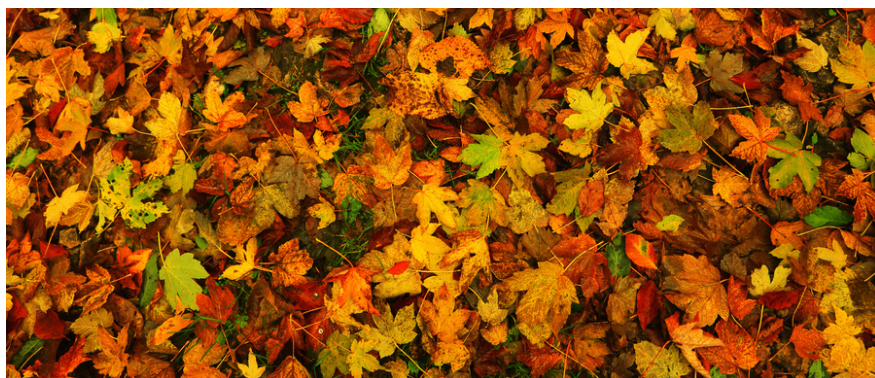
Annotations

Success Criteria: I can identify the characteristics of endings.

It is a bit surprising to some that the first phase is “the ending.” After all, endings should come at the end, right? When discussing transition, “the ending” means the end of the old normal. Whatever was before has to come to a close.

This phase requires letting go of old approaches, beliefs, and roles. If your district adopts a new science textbook, that might mean disposing of some physical books, but it might also mean that you have to let go of certain topics or approaches that you once found valuable. If you are transitioning from a traditional classroom to a student-centered classroom, you may have to shed your identity as an “instructor” to make way for your new identity as a “facilitator.”

It does not matter whether the change is positive or negative, it still takes a toll on the individual. Both the educator who is assigned to take on an unfamiliar subject and the educator who is promoted to department chair will find a dip in their overall performance. Both may catch themselves identifying with an earlier role at first: “I’m really a physics teacher; I’m just teaching science for a bit” or “Department chair” just looks odd in my email signature.” If your change is a new administrator, you may catch yourself saying things like “Mr. X always did things like this...” Transition always lags behind the change.



Annotations

You cannot rush endings, but there are some strategies to help make the ending easier. Most of these strategies take the form of some ritualized or symbolic gesture. In the same way that graduation ceremonies help students close a chapter in their lives, you need something to close your chapter. This could be one of the ideas below or something else entirely:

- Making a scrapbook or collection of your favorite memories from the old normal.
- Meeting with colleagues outside of work to celebrate/say goodbye.
- Tossing older materials into a fire or trash can; symbolically “burying it.”
- Changing your classroom decor to reflect the new status.

"Try this!" Activity

Come up with at least two other ways to symbolically let go of the “old normal” below.



Phase 2: The Neutral Zone

Annotations

Success Criteria: I can identify the characteristics of neutral zones.

The neutral zone is a space between the ending and the new beginning. You have shed your old identity and let go of the old normal but have not begun the process of building the new normal.

As discussed previously, this middle phase is often marked by a drop in productivity. You are likely to feel disoriented. It may feel like there is no clear direction. This is one reason why this middle phase is sometimes called the “wilderness.” When in the neutral zone, it is important to give yourself grace.

It is not all negative, however. As there may be no clear direction, the neutral zone is a great opportunity to reexamine your priorities:

- What is most important to you?
- What is most important to your students?
- What does it mean to be a teacher?
- What is the role of education in society?



The neutral zone can also be a great opportunity to experiment and try new things. If your school is making the shift from a traditional environment to mass-customized learning, you could experiment with different scheduled offerings for learners. If your team is trying to set up a PLC, you could try holding PLC meetings online or asynchronously and with different roles/tools. In other words, you can take advantage of this temporary “directionlessness” by trying different directions at once.

Like all three phases, you cannot force them or plan them out. However, you may be able to make the transition easier. A common recommendation for this middle phase is to extract yourself from your day-to-day environment and/or to take quiet time for yourself. Examples of this could be:

- Lesson planning at a coffee shop after school hours rather than in your classroom.
- Going on walks during lunch rather than eating in your room.
- Taking a short road trip on a weekend.

"Try this!" Activity

Come up with at least one other way you could extract yourself from your day-to-day environment and/or take quiet time for yourself.



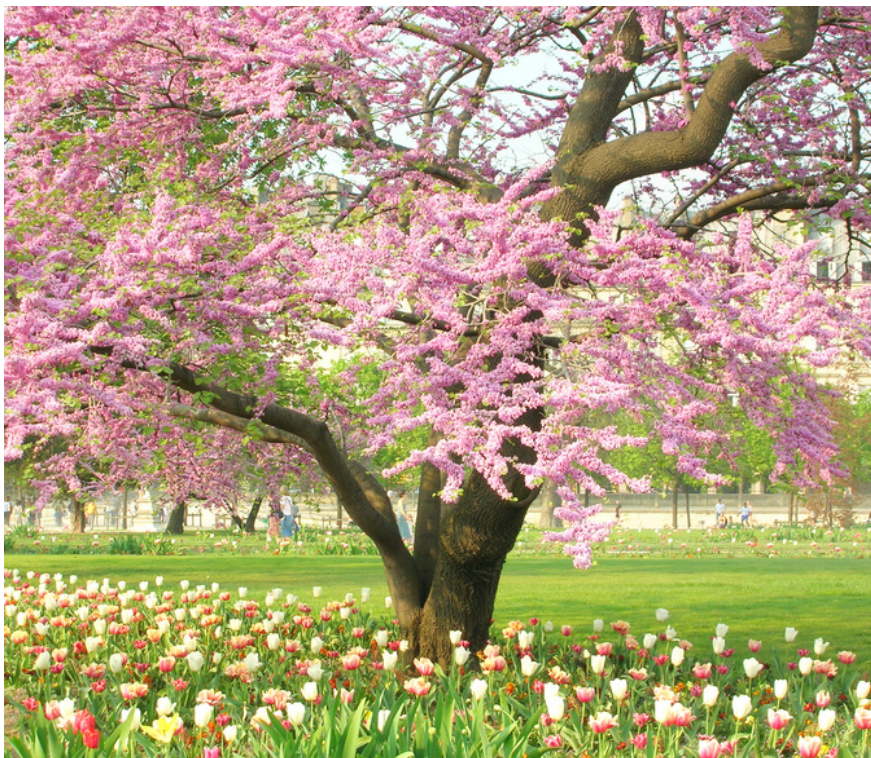
Phase 3: The New Beginning

Annotations

Success Criteria: I can identify the characteristics of new beginnings.

The third and final phase of inner transition is the new beginning. This may occur at the end of the outer change or it may occur many weeks, months, or even years later. This stage is marked by a commitment to a new identity or way of being. This eventually results in a return to a sense of wholeness, a new normal.

In larger educational shifts, innovators and leaders often reach this phase earlier than their peers and subordinates. This is due to them encountering ideas earlier or being the ones to instigate the change. A common tension related to change is when one party has already adapted to the new normal while others are still processing. For teams going through change, it is critical to remember that transition happens at its own pace. It is okay to struggle. It is also important to recognize and accommodate others who may be struggling.



Annotations

A common strategy to support this phase is to locate yourself in the new paradigm. This could be done through discussion, journaling, or diagramming. Some questions you might ask yourself include:

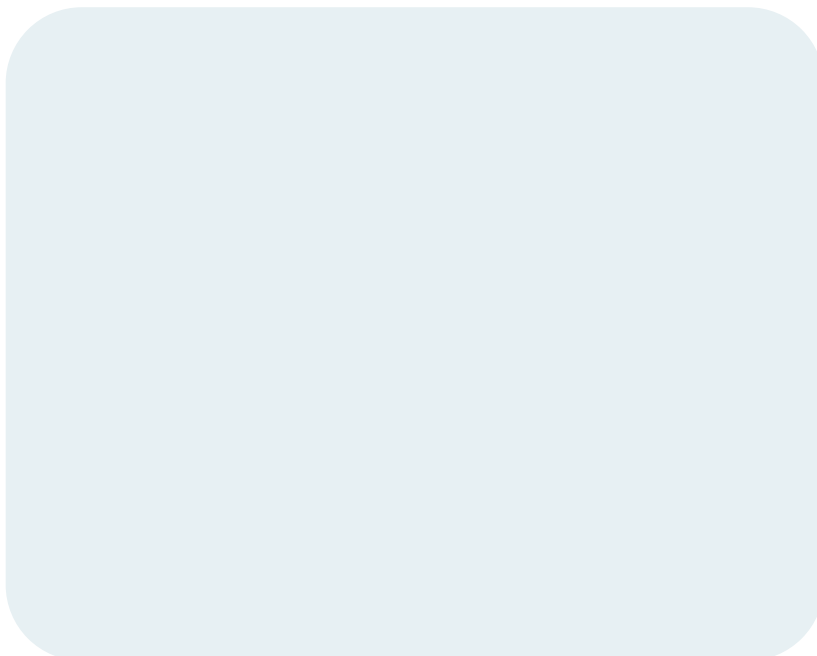
- What is the end goal of the change?
- What kind of future will change this result in?
- What is your role in this vision of the future?
- What strengths will you bring to this future?
- In what areas will you need to grow for the future?

Other common recommendations for this phase focus on celebrating small successes:

- Make a list of what you are enjoying at the moment.
- Come up with new “titles” for yourself based on your strengths (ex. “Seminar Master”).

"Try this!" Activity

Come up with at least two other ways you could help locate yourself in the new paradigm and/or celebrate small successes.



Transition Self-Assessment

Annotations

Before moving on, take this opportunity to assess yourself on the outcome and paired success criteria.

- I can trace how one goes through transition during change.
 - I can differentiate between transition and change.
 - I can identify the characteristics of endings.
 - I can identify the characteristics of neutral zones.
 - I can identify the characteristics of new beginnings.

Select a movie, novel, or game where a character goes through an inner transition. In the form of a couple of paragraphs, slide deck, video, or another medium, describe how the character went through the following:

1. An Ending
2. A Neutral Zone
3. A New Beginning

Reflective Change Journal

Step 1: Identify the Change

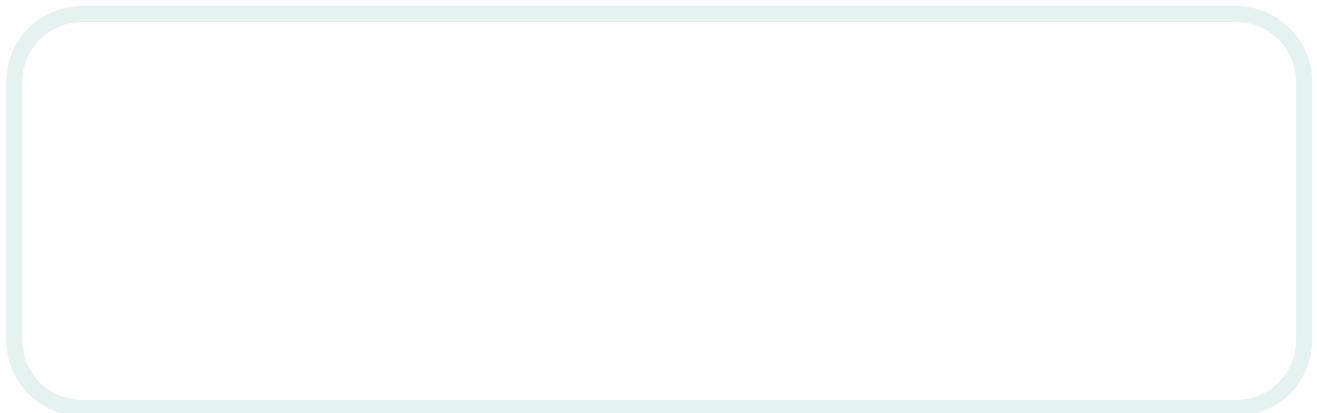
Describe the change you are experiencing.



Categorize the change. Is it an individual change or a group change? Is it a voluntary or involuntary change? Is it a singular change or an evolving, ongoing change?

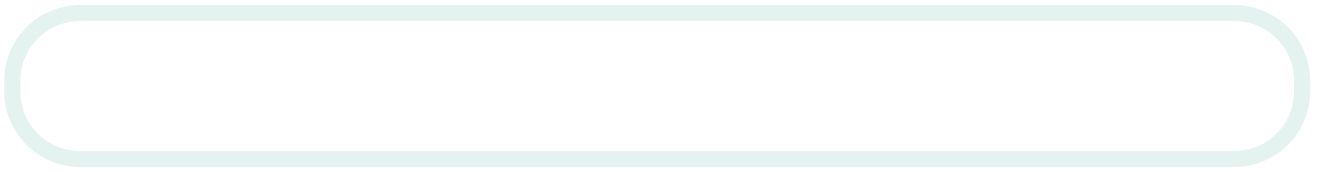


Describe how others might view the change.

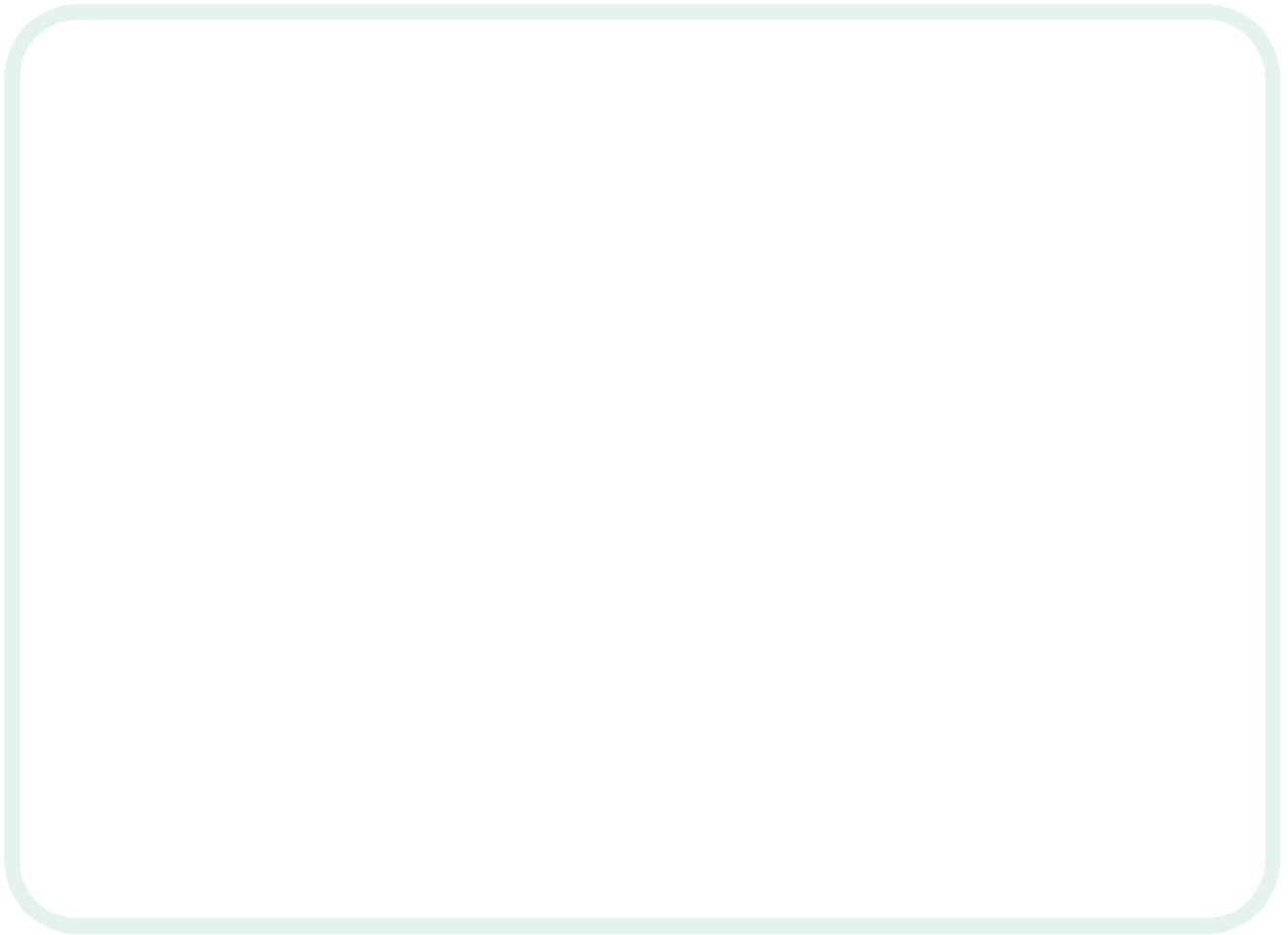


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 1)

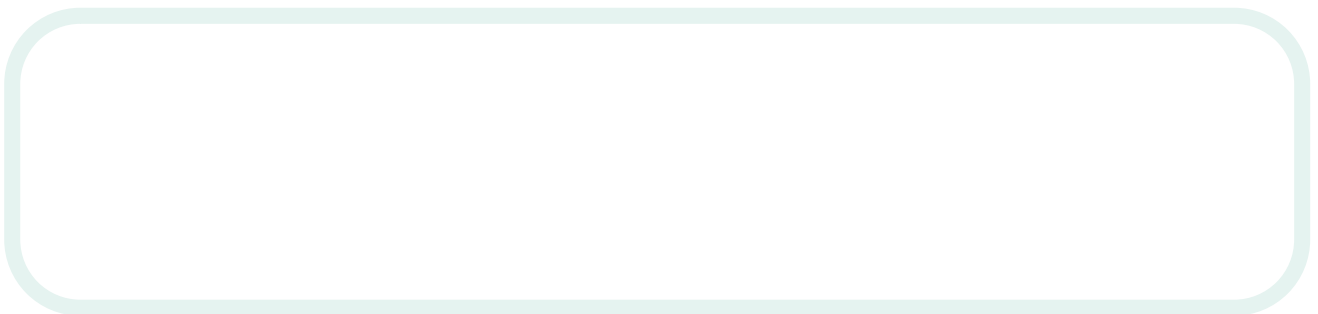
What is the date?



Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.

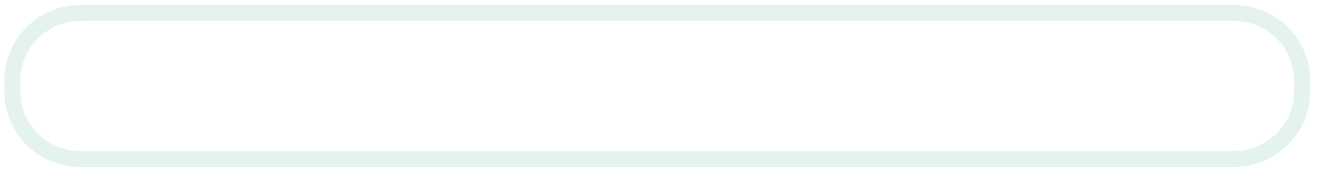


What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?

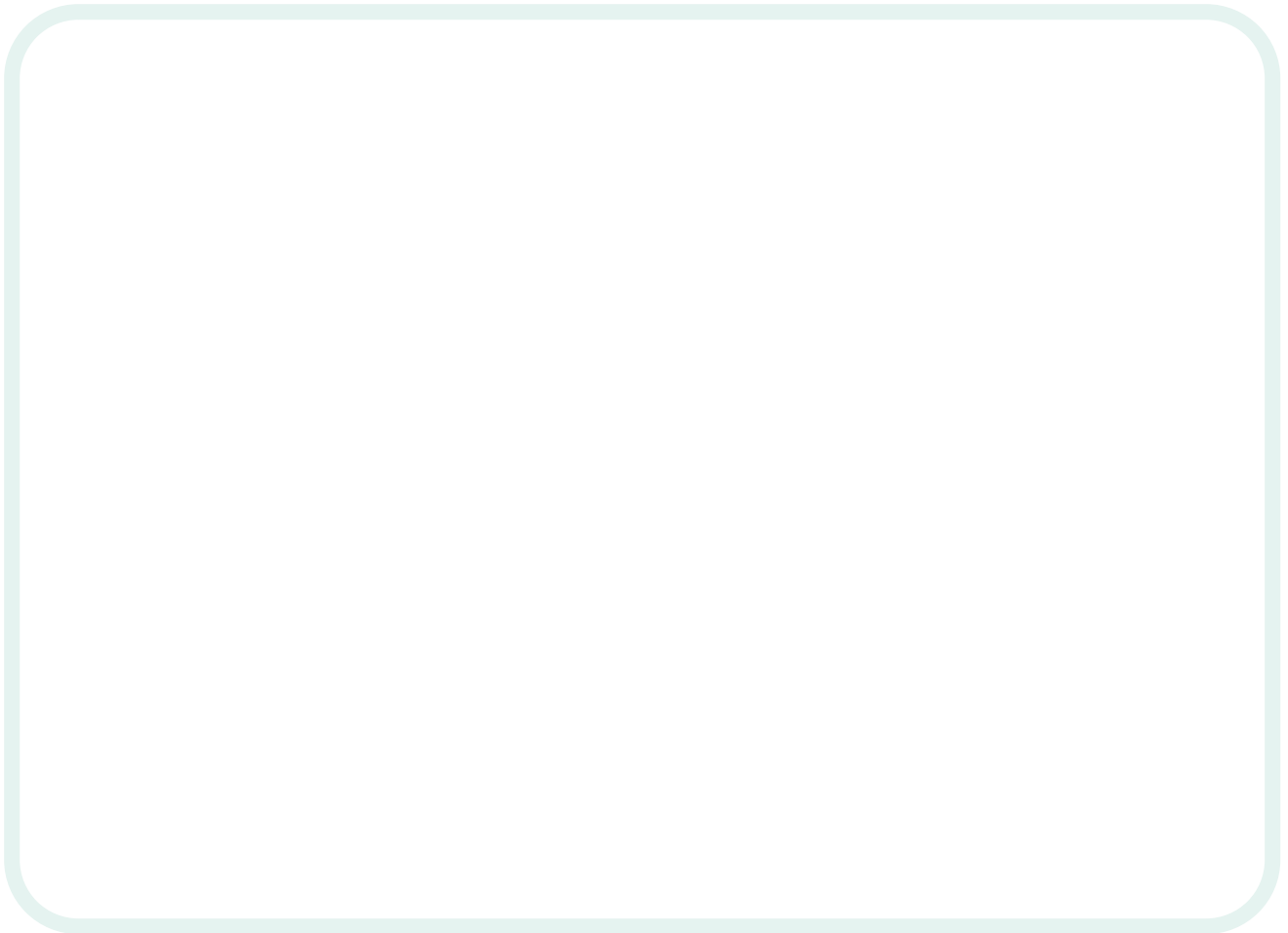


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 2)

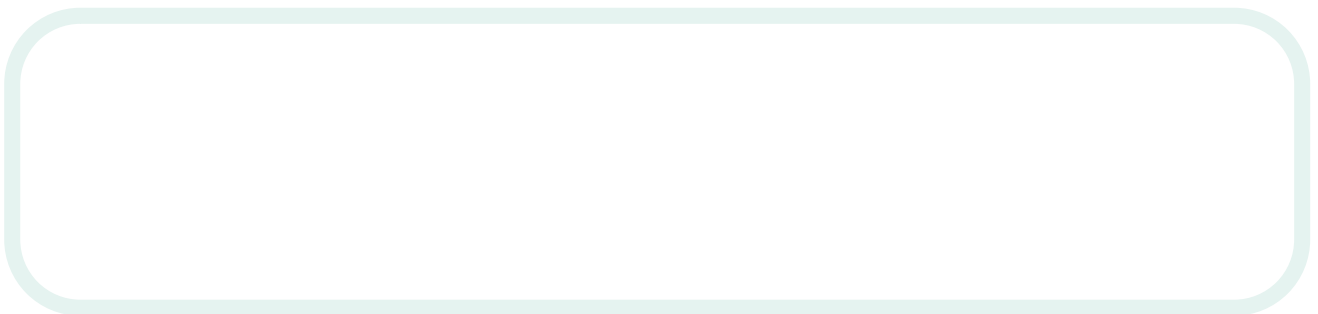
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Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.

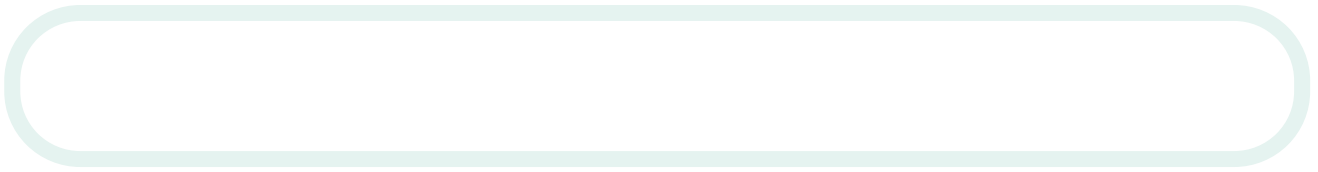


What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?

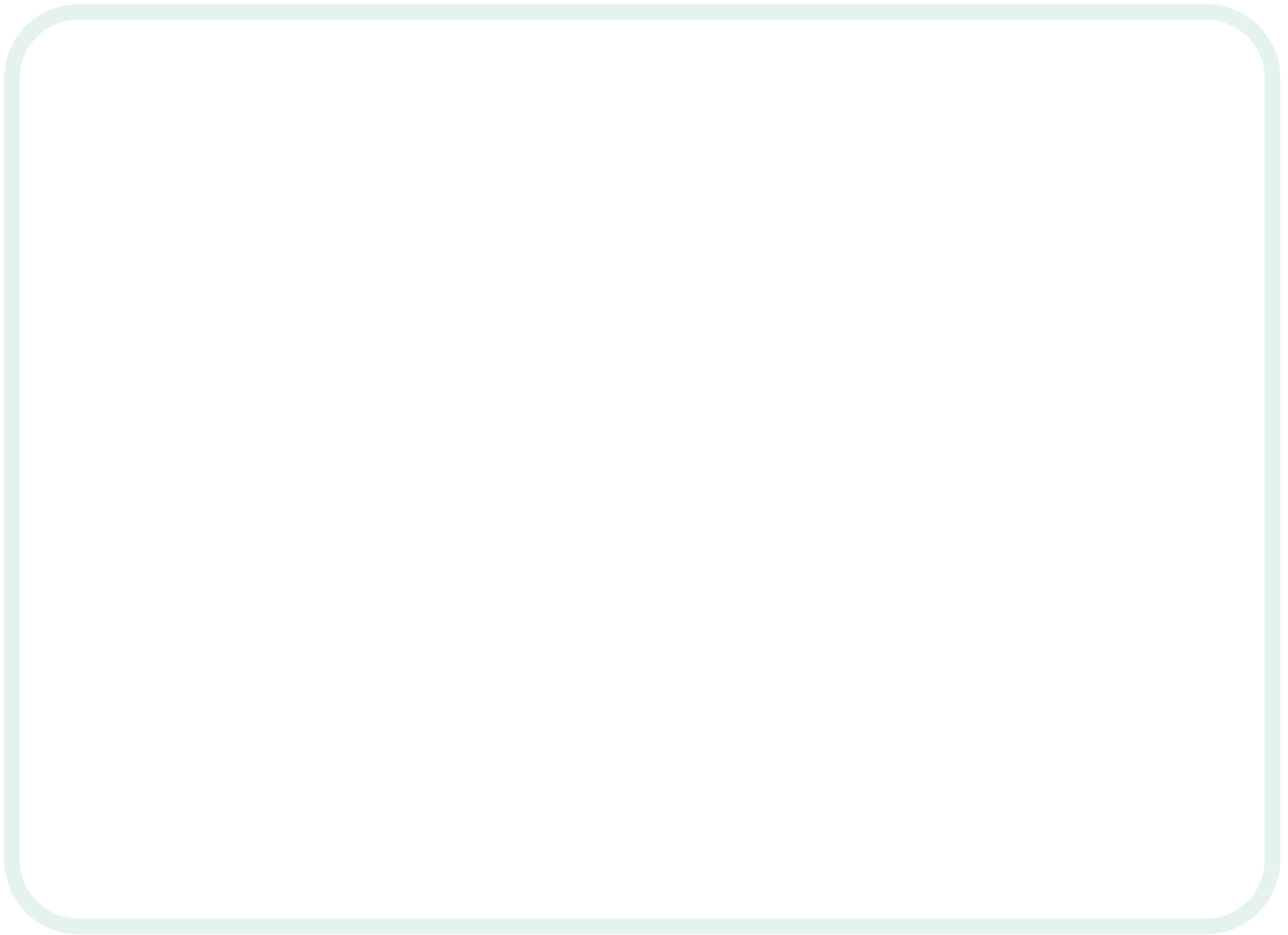


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 3)

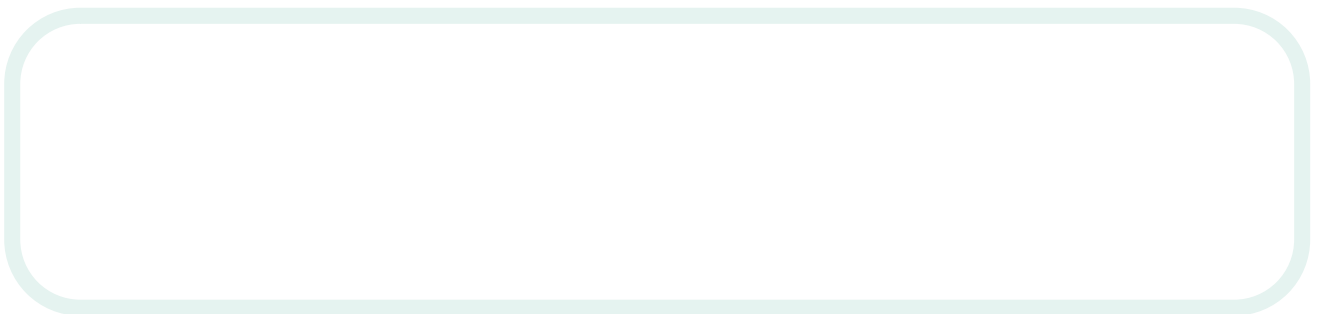
What is the date?



Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.

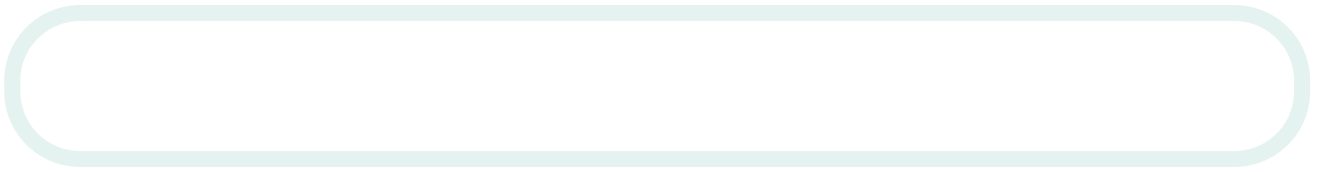


What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?

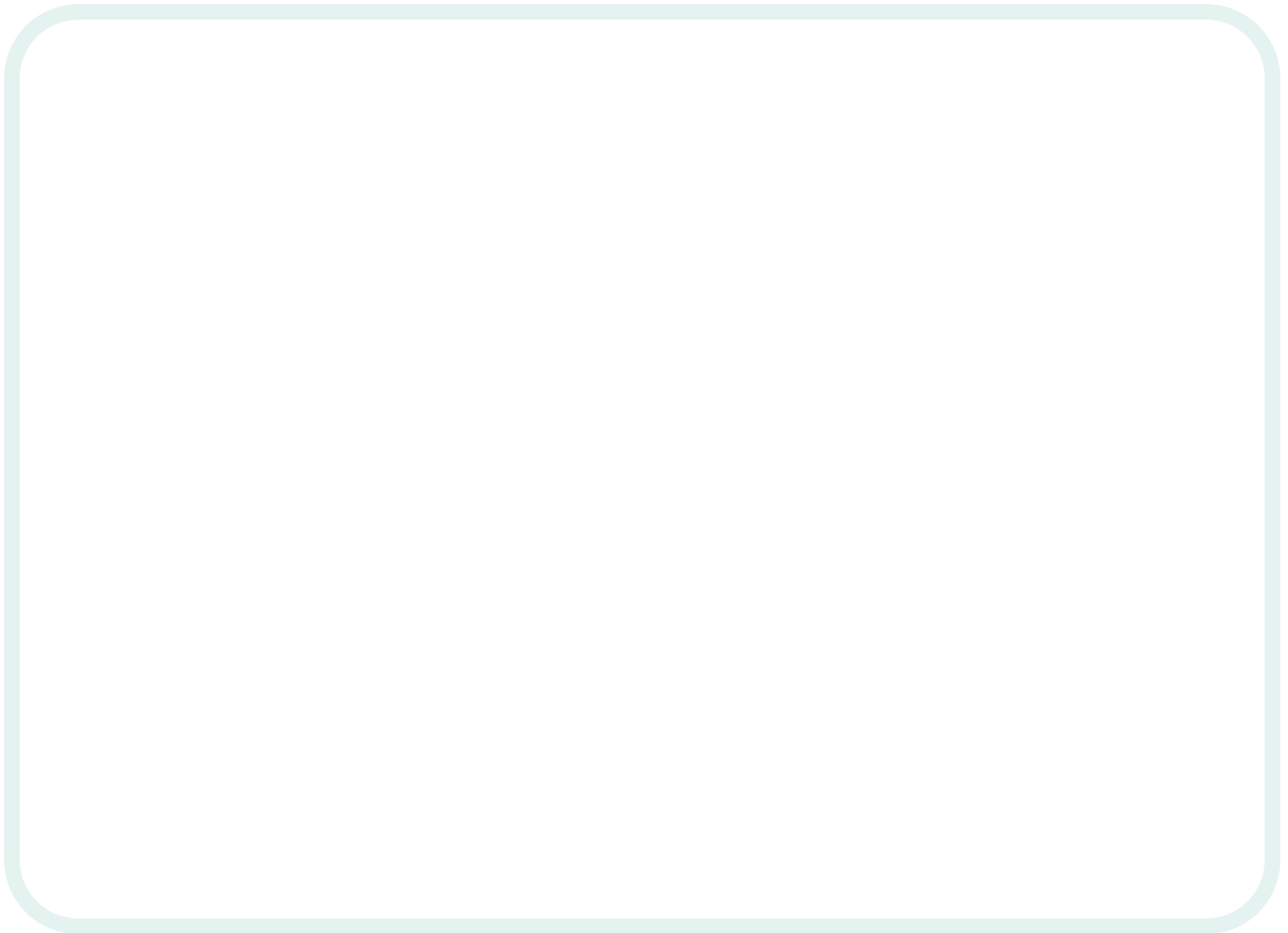


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 4)

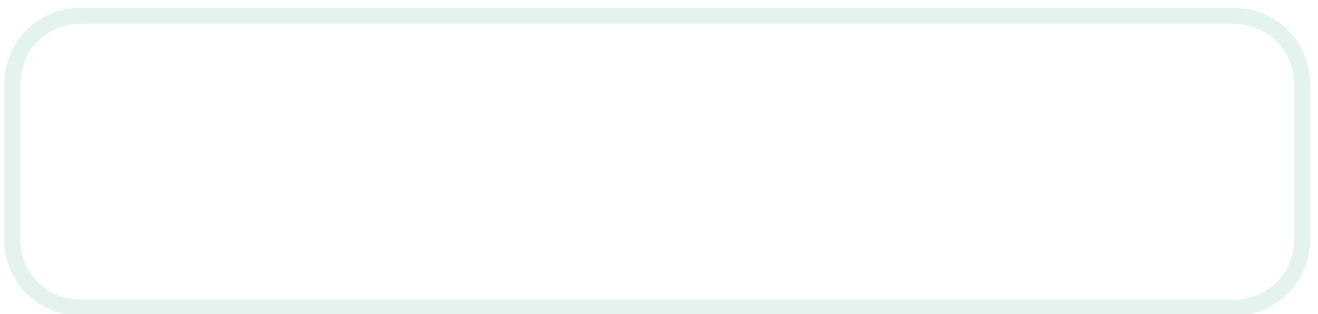
What is the date?



Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.

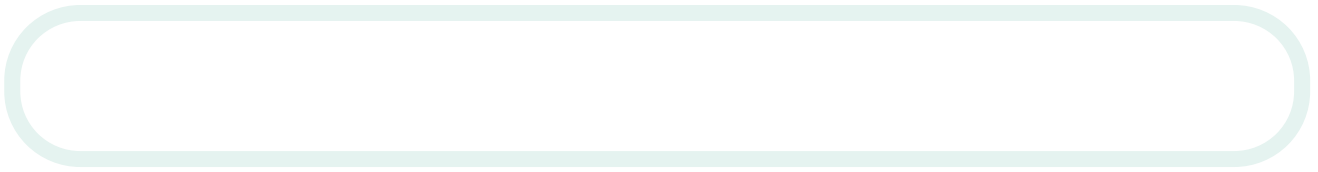


What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?

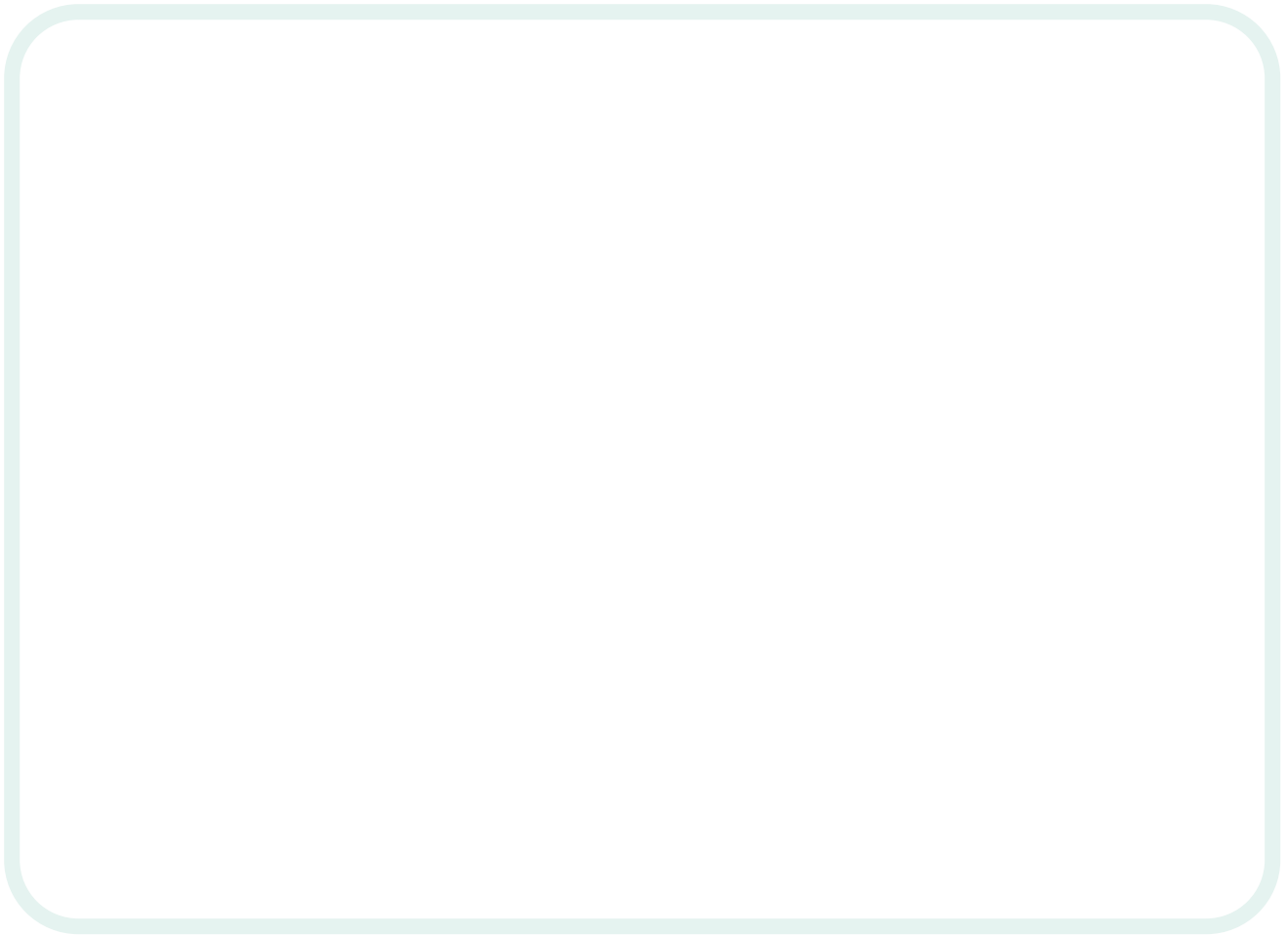


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 5)

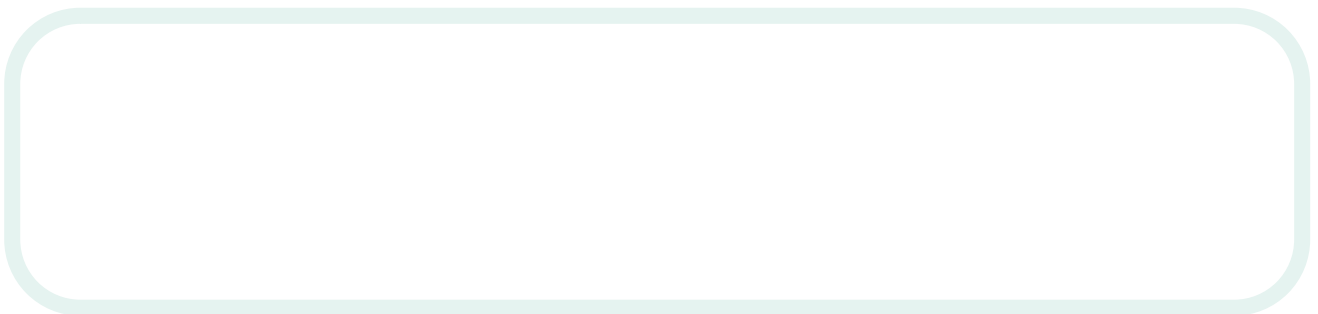
What is the date?



Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.

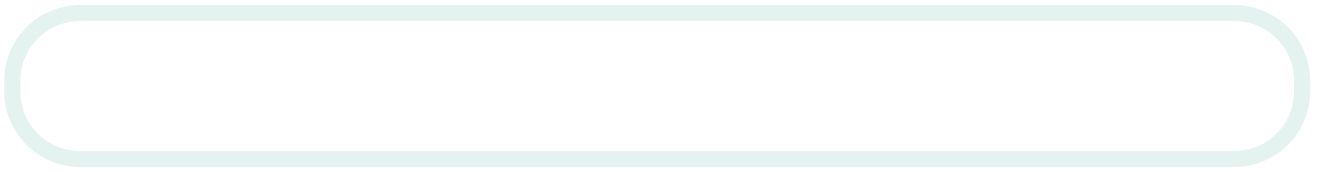


What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?

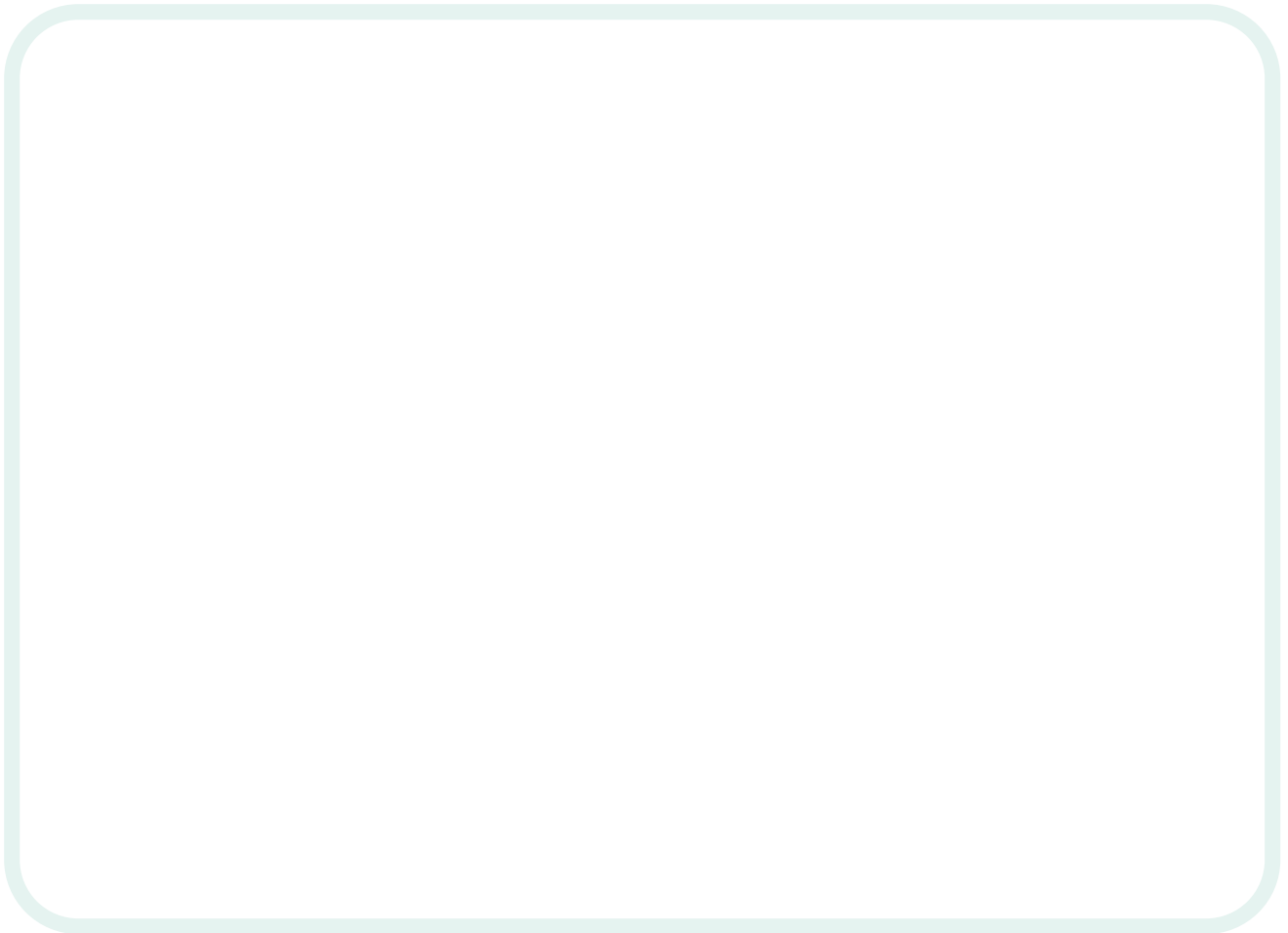


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 6)

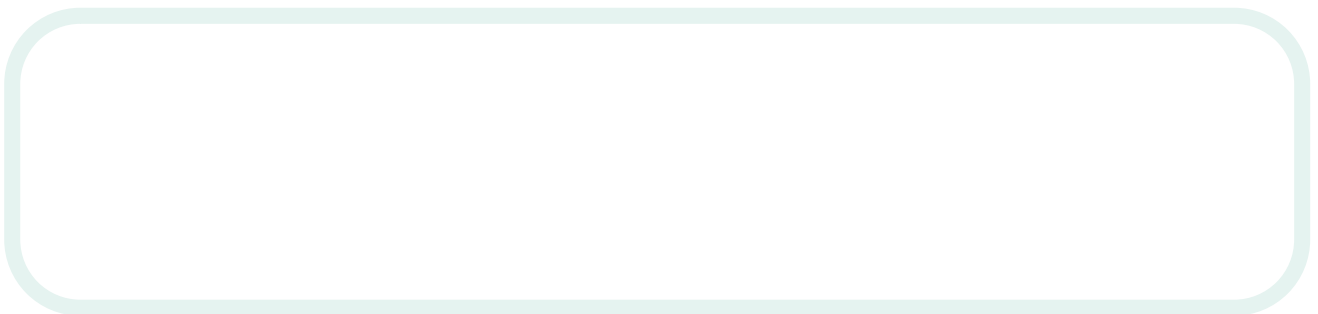
What is the date?



Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.

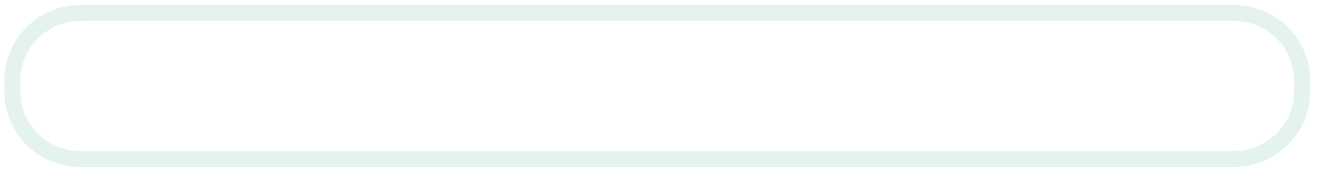


What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?

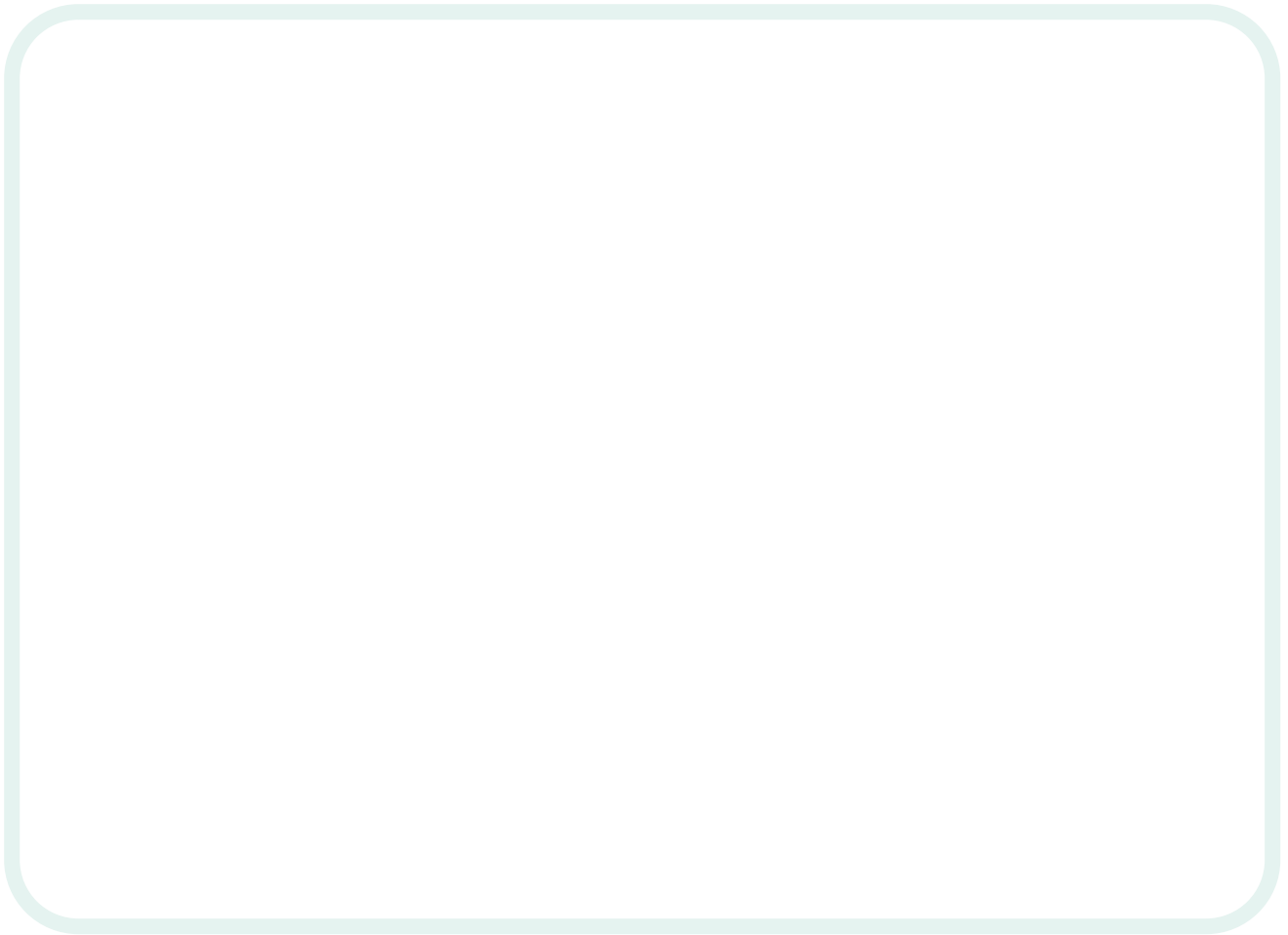


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 7)

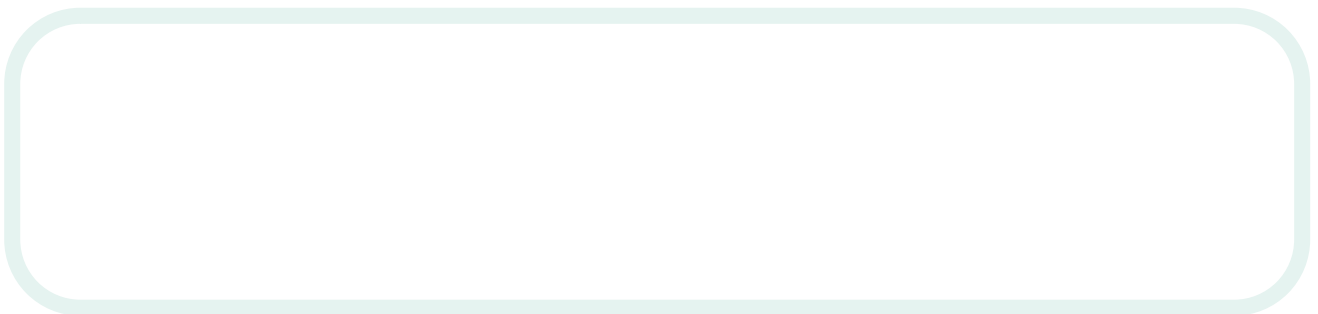
What is the date?



Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.

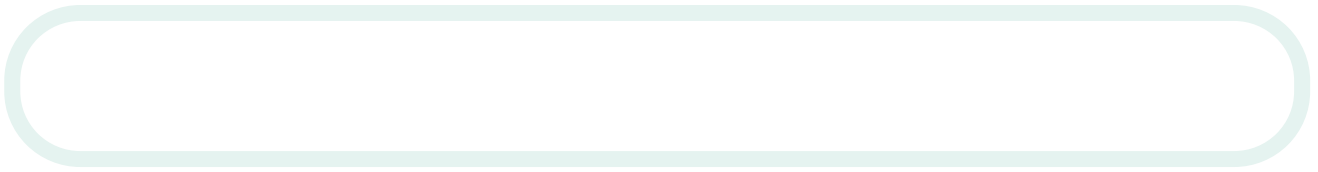


What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?

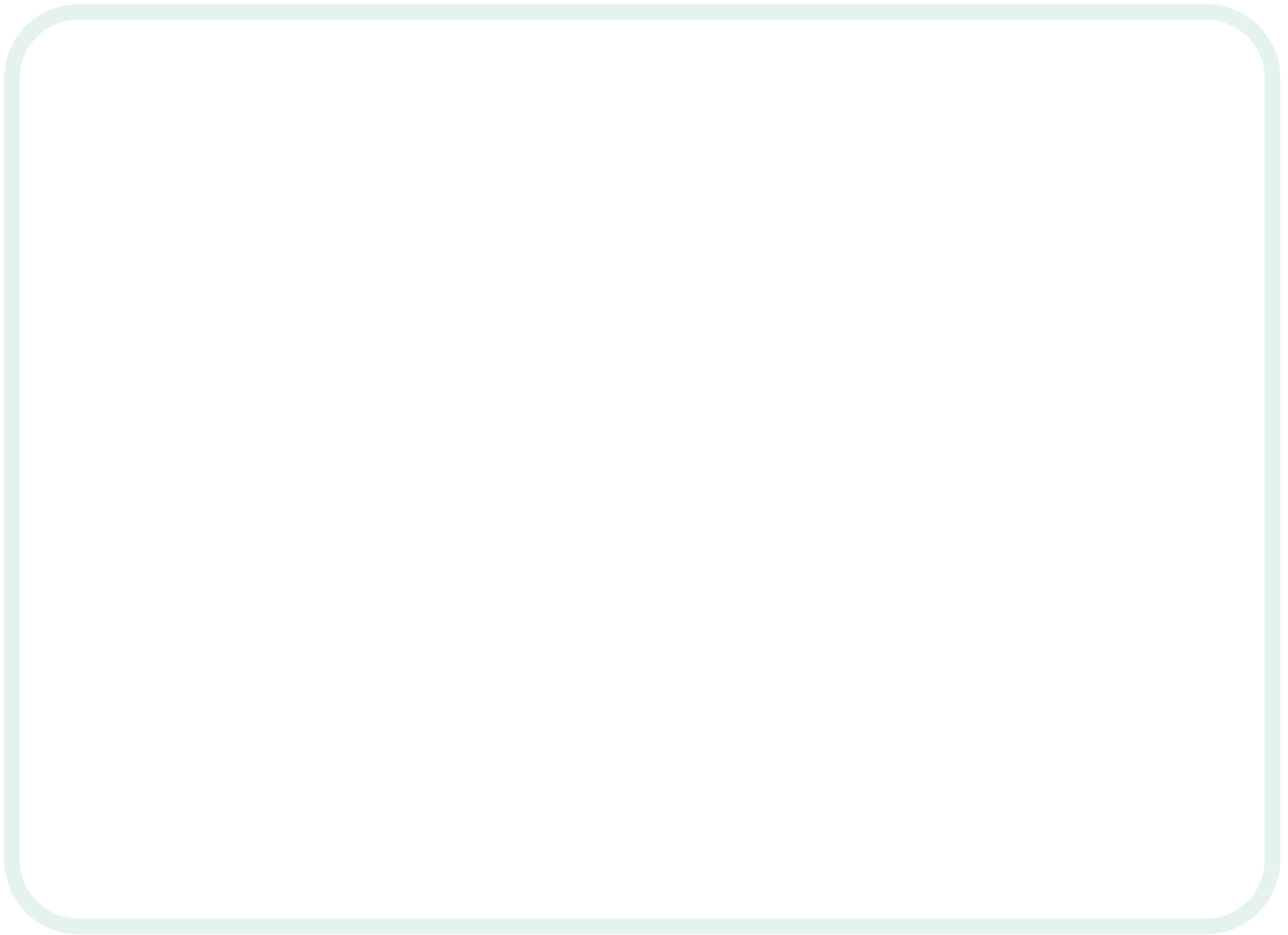


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 8)

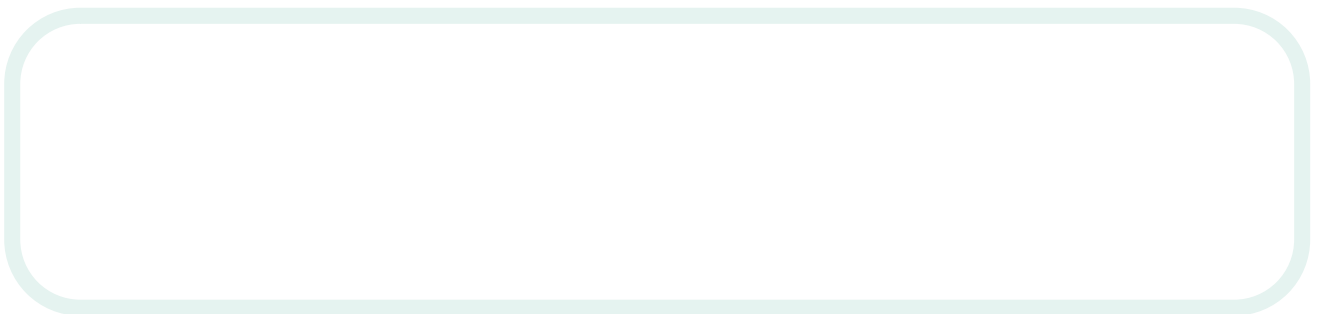
What is the date?



Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.

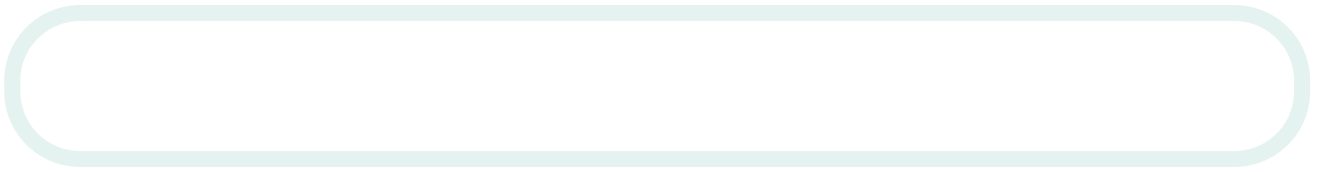


What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?

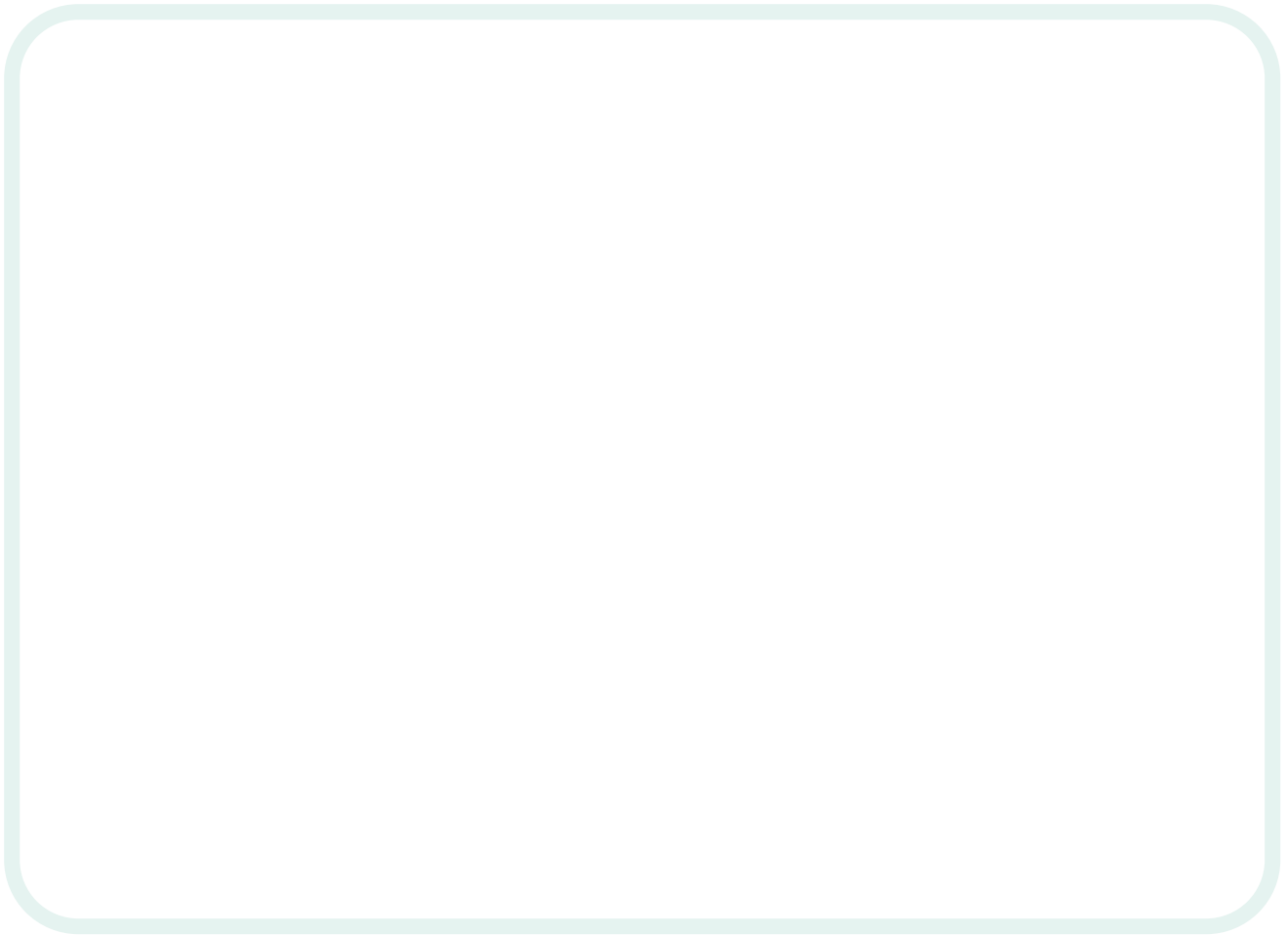


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 9)

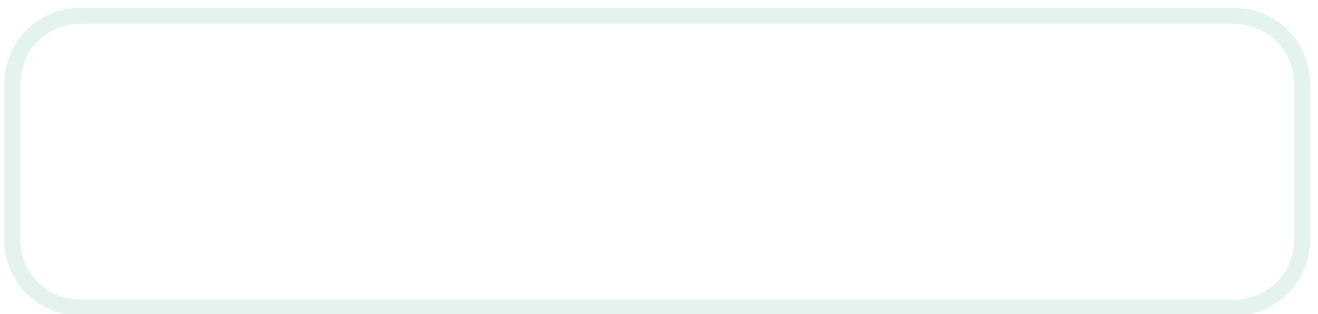
What is the date?



Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.

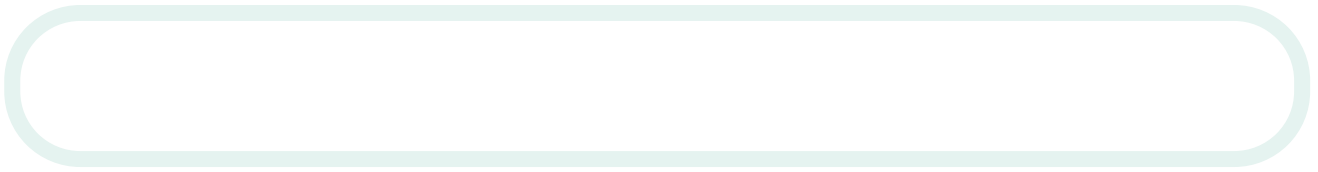


What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?

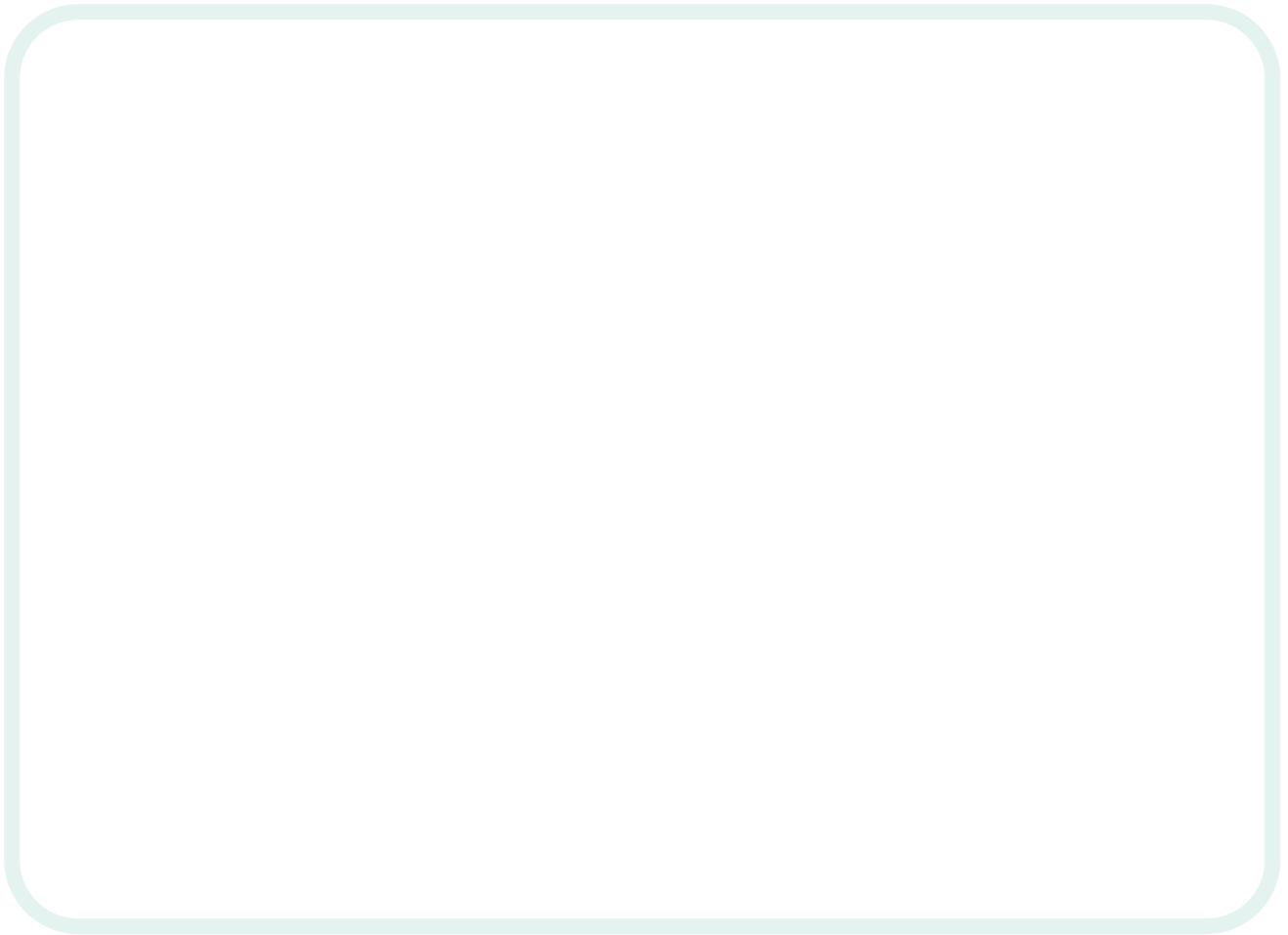


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 10)

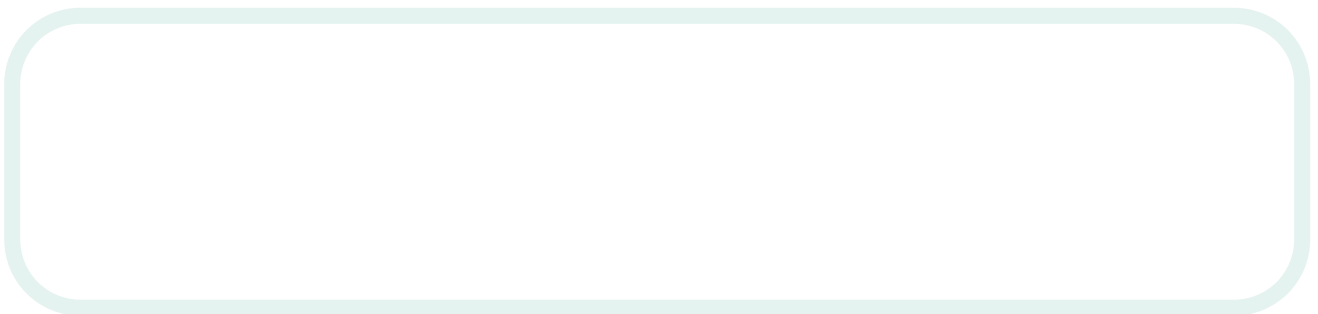
What is the date?



Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.

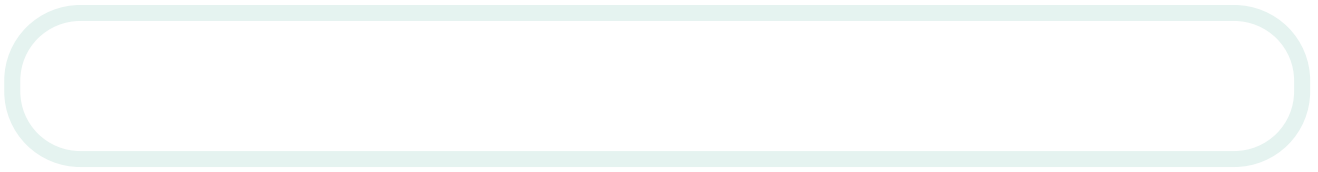


What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?

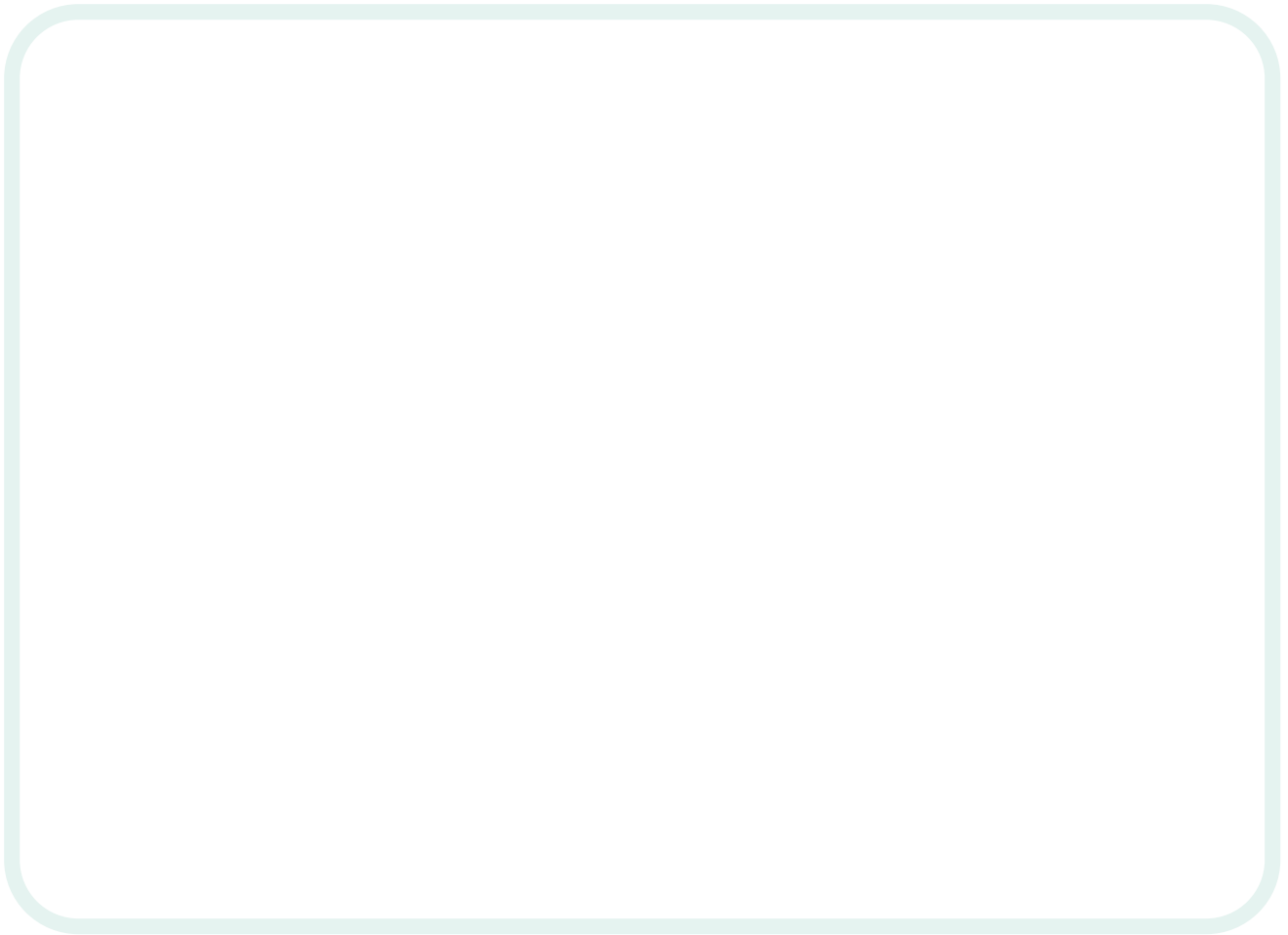


Step 2: Track the Transition (Entry 11)

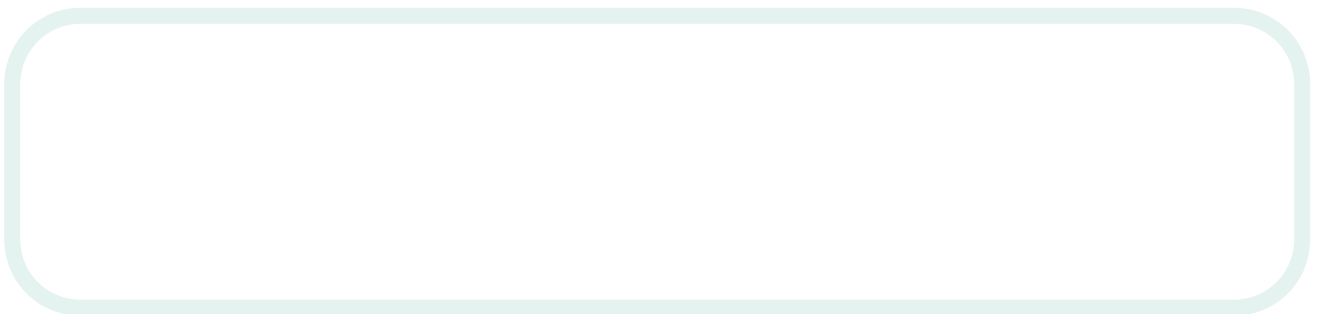
What is the date?



Record your thoughts and experiences with the change so far.



What phase of transition do you feel you are in? How do you know?



Bibliography

NOTE: This covers both the *Embracing Change* and the *Leading Change* documents.

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