

Intended Future, Current Reality, Transition Plan

While participating in an industry association board meeting, where we attempted to reset the association’s long-term strategy, Debbie McAneny, who served at the time as the head of commercial real estate lending at John Hancock Life Insurance Company, introduced me to the current reality, intended future framework. Since learning the framework from Debbie decades ago, I have repurposed this framework for use in strategic planning, problem solving, PowerPoint presentations, career planning, and even for setting out my own transition plans in life. Let me walk you through it.

Take out a piece of paper and create three vertical columns, with the middle column twice as wide as the columns on the right and the left. Title the column on the right Intended Future.

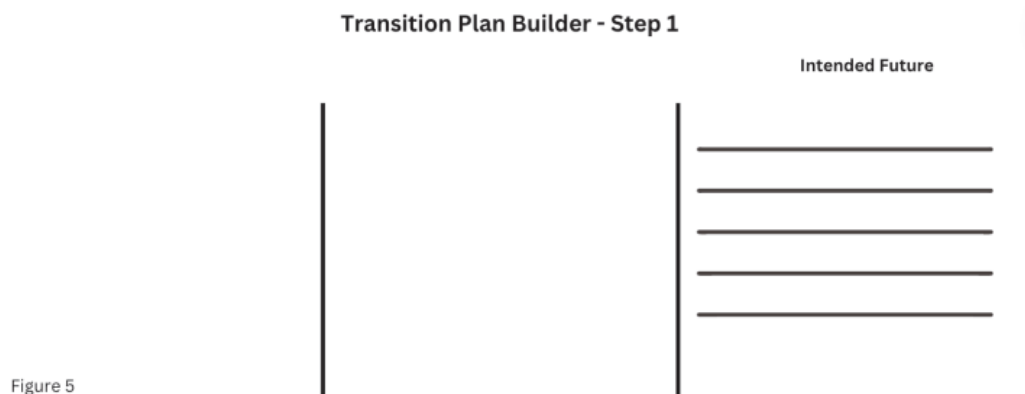


Figure 5

Step 1 is to list/inventory what we identify/dream about elements of our Intended Future.

Now, think about and pick a point in time in the future. This could be three months, three years, ten years, or thirty years out. The duration doesn’t matter. It’s just a point in time and an exercise. If you are struggling picking the point in time and if you are stuck even at the beginning of the exercise, let us steal a concept from author Simon Sinek, from his book *The Infinite Game*, where he talks about moving the goalposts as far away as you need to unstick yourself. (Pick a time in the future far, far away.)

A properly envisioned intended future can create the lift of pull energy. As such, I encourage you to fantasize. In fact, I insist that you fantasize. That is indeed the point. I find that since your intended future is at this point pure fantasy (“man plans, while God laughs”), when using this framework, you need to pick a time in the week when you are at your most serene, fantastical best.

To begin, maybe you need to know your biorhythms, which I address in chapter 7, but let me explain here.

For me, the best time to work on the intended future portion of the framework would be after dinner on a Friday night when I am alone with my thoughts. Or it could be Sunday morning after a good night's sleep and a hard workout and active Saturday. (This is what I mean by knowing your own personal biorhythms.)

Now, pick that future point in time (duration out into the future), close your eyes, and dream yourself to that intended future. Then, open your eyes and take inventory of all that you envision around you. What elements of that future do you see? List them until you are exhausted. What do you see around you when you peek into your specific intended future? Be limitlessly specific. Include material possessions, the job, the club, the home(s), vacations, friends, and family—things you envision actually doing in this fantasy. (At some level that environment that you fantasize about is indeed an outcome you seek.)

Does your intended future include an ex-partner, a new spouse, a girlfriend/boyfriend (all three?), kids, a dog, a plane, a set of skills, prestige, a location to live, another language to be able to speak fluently, or an ability to juggle chainsaws? Or do you simply have an intended future where you own enough income-producing assets that give you monthly cash flow you can rely upon so that you don't have to work but can hang out with your fourteen grandchildren? Or play endless rounds of golf? It doesn't matter.

List everything you can imagine in that intended future. Be silly in your comprehensiveness of this list. Then put this piece of paper away, for at least a week.

The last time I did this exercise was one Christmas vacation with my family in Mexico. Every year over Christmas vacation, I try to assess how I did on my annual goals in order to recalibrate my journey for the year to come. At some level, I attempt to choose context words to guide me year to year. While I don't remember which pre-pandemic vacation I did the intended future fantasy, I do remember marveling about how well my father managed his financial independence.

My dad passed February 24, 2022. He was ninety-three. His passing set for me a milestone I wanted to achieve (#BWEIM): I wanted to live to ninety-four. So, I picked my intended future date out to my mid-nineties. One of my goals in life is to be married fifty years to Nancy. As she was my second marriage, as we came together when we were forty-five, I need to last till age ninety-five. So my fantasy indeed included Nancy, our vibrant marriage, physical fitness, mobility

creating physical freedom, economic independence (so I didn't have to be put in a nursing home), board and advisory positions where I could continue to mentor young professionals, constant visits by my four children, their spouses, and their kids (so I couldn't grow up to become a curmudgeon), and yes, some form of involvement in aviation.

Back to your exercise—

A week or so later, you need to sit down and do an inventory of your current reality. Minding your biorhythms, you need to pick a different time or day in the week. To accomplish this next task, pick a time in the week when you are your most coldhearted, calculating, and unemotional in your assessments. It's time for "just the facts, ma'am!" For me, it's 6:00 a.m. Monday morning when I'm prepared to face the week. Retrieve that piece of paper you started and add Current Reality to the top of the left column.

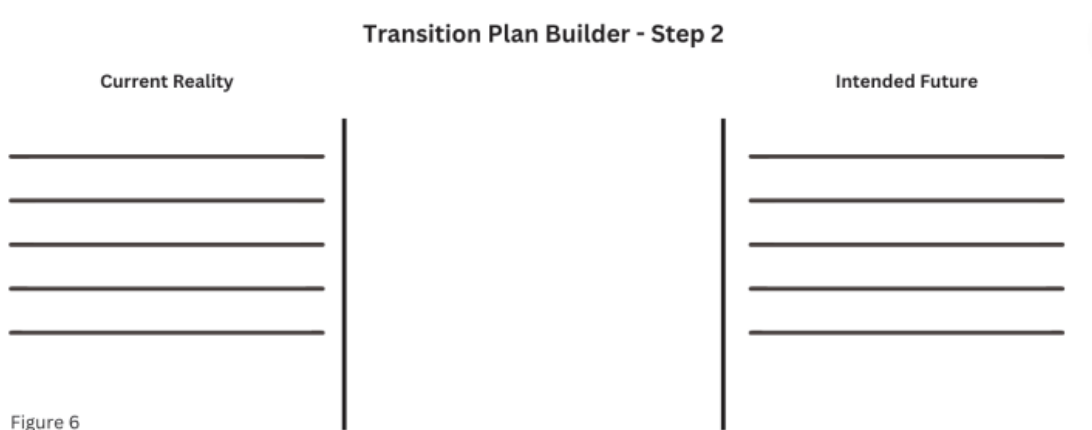


Figure 6

Step 2 is to list what your Current Reality looks like.

This is the time where you don't fantasize, nor do you close your eyes. Rather, look around you and take an honest inventory of everything in your life. What's going on for you? Do you have close friends? Are you pleased with your partner? Your job? Your path? Are you overworked, underpaid, confused, possess too much debt, or not enough net worth? Are you out of shape, need to lose weight, stuck in unhealthy relationships?

This is a time for radical candor with yourself. Inventory it all. And in that inventory don't just beat on yourself with the negatives. Inventory the good stuff too—where you live, who you spend time with, what you love to spend time doing. Once complete, then put the piece of paper away for at least another week.

A week or so later, pick a time in the week when you are more balanced in your perspectives. Maybe it's midweek when the pressures of the early week have worn off and your sights are set on the weekend.

Then pull out the same piece of paper with the three columns, and what do you see? If you stare at what you see on the right and left columns, can you find a pattern(s)? As you look left and right at your current reality and intended future, what you should see is a gap.

Step 3 becomes the transition plan for bridging the gap between your current reality and your intended future. This is where the action plan, the real value of the exercise, comes into play as you inventory the activities to get from your current reality to your intended future. (This transition plan becomes the source activities.)



Figure 7

Step 3 involves bridging the gap between your current reality and your intended future. This becomes the transition plan and related activities.

If, by way of example, you decided that your intended future included living and working in Portugal. In your current reality, you realized you could not speak any language other than English. Obviously, you will conclude that between now and then (the time of your intended future) you will obviously need to learn Portuguese. An action plan is now needed and begins to develop. Where can you learn Portuguese? At a local community college? Online? An app? A tutor? You get the idea.

By imagining an intended future, and by assessing a current reality, you can begin to tie those two columns together with a transition plan designed to bridge the gap. By focusing on an intended future, you have a direction. Tying the two columns together, you can create common sub contexts,

and those contexts become a collection of action plans for you to execute over time. The time it takes to reach your destination is now set.

Outcome vs. Source Activities

When I teach people about time management, I often find folks confused between activity and progress. It seems to me that everyone thinks they are busy. Busy no doubt, however I ask, to what end? The difference then between activity and progress is that progress is activity toward an endgame (#BWEIM)—an outcome.

It is here that we need to underscore the distinction between outcome and source activities. Again, I find, like with context vs. content, smart business professionals continue to confuse outcomes with the source activities necessary to achieve the outcomes related to their intended futures. Maybe it's because most of us live our lives, have our arguments, fight or support our wars, all in content. But you can be an outcome; you have to do source activities in order to have what you want.

Recently retired college football coach, Nick Saban, talks about “The Process.” Nick Saban has won more college football championships than any other coach in history. By a lot! Did you also know that never, not one day during the season, does Coach Saban talk about winning a college football championship. That's right. None of the coaches ever talk about the desired outcome. Instead, they can be a winner if they do the work to have the championship.

Rather, Saban teaches that the prize, the championship, the goal, the outcome is simply a matter of doing your job. Day to day, play to play, game to game, do your job as well as you can. The process, the day-to-day efforts one puts in, is everyone's source activity.

Source activity leads to outcome. With a clearly defined desired outcome (aka goal, target, #BWEIM, or intended future), the source activities for the transition plan materialize rather quickly. However, without a clearly defined outcome, to hold the context, source activities can send you to a completely different destination. Think of the airline pilot. If their destination is not locked in, all the source activities it takes to fly a plane will never help them land in the desired location.

In life, the money we earn is an outcome from taking a particular job and doing the work hired to do that role. The job is the source activity that leads to buying a house—another outcome. Let me try that again: Most think making money to spend is an outcome. I posit we have merged source

and outcome activities and confused them. The job done well, doing the work, is the source activity. Creating value for the employer is an outcome for our employer but another source activity for us. Getting that raise, that bonus, then becomes an outcome. Another outcome could be a promotion, a title change, new and improved responsibilities. Which, down the road, just might allow us to take a special vacation, learn a new language, buy a house, take flying lessons, pick up golf, or maybe even buy a plane.

Who am I to challenge Nick Saban, college football's GOAT? With no NCAA championships on my resume, where I differ from the great coach is that I recognize that an outcome focused upon creates pull energy and can provide context, which gives meaning to the content of our daily lives and those source activities.