



NICHOLAS FOSTER

# EXPONENTIAL TRANSITION

THE 5 COMMON  
MISTAKES

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## What's an Exponential Transition?

As your career or business scales to the next level, you engage in an exciting but challenging transition where expectations and demands of you grow exponentially.

At the same time, your young family have heartfelt expectations of you spending quality time with them and don't understand why you can't.

If you don't successfully navigate this transition:

- You will fail to meet the demands and expectations of you at work.
- You will burn out because you spend even more time and energy at work trying to get on top of your rapidly scaling workload.

- Your family will get what's left of you, which is not a lot, and it will put a strain on your relationships.

Ultimately this could impact your career, your business, and your relationships with your loved ones.

My clients, colleagues, and I have all made this challenging transition and made mistakes which caused pain, stress and frustration for us and our loved ones.

Today, I will show you the common mistakes we made and how you can avoid or overcome them.

Nick

## The Author

My name's Nicholas Foster, and I've been where you are today – trying to meet the exponentially growing expectations and demands on me while trying to be a great partner and parent.



I spent 15 years building my career from software developer to successful technology executive at Credit Suisse and UBS. During this time, I built and led global teams of over 300 people, managed complex strategic change programmes of up to \$40m and was accountable for one of the most critical trade management systems in the bank.

In parallel to growing this successful career, I got married to my wife Debby and became a dad to two exceptional children.

Since 2016, I've been a leadership coach and career coach, specialising in enabling my clients to successfully navigate their exponential transitions.

## Mistake #1

# YOU DON'T STRETCH YOUR THINKING

*“Strategic leaders must not get consumed by the operational and tactical side of their work. They have a duty to find time to shape the future.”*

*Stephanie S. Mead*

Over the last few years, Jason has built up a team of software developers to work on anything that's required by a business unit in London, headed up Matthew. The business unit has done very well, and Matthew appreciates the work Jason and his team have done for them. They are highly valued, recognised and rewarded.

But that's all about to change.

Other global business units have also done well, and the company continues to scale. But the technology strategy to get the company this in not sustainable in terms of cost, complexity, and risk management.

Therefore, senior leadership has defined a technology strategy to create a common platform that all global business units can utilise and add their functionality to.

The new platform rollout and adoption is going well in the US, and it's time to roll it out in London. Alex is part of the core team and is assigned to help Jason and his team utilise the new strategic platform and help get business buy-in by demonstrating how easy it is to add business functionality as well as leverage functionality developed by other global business units.

Rather than stretch his thinking and seeing what was best for the company, Jason saw this as a threat to how he and his team currently work and blocked Alex every way he could. But he did this in a passive-aggressive way as not to raise attention to senior management.

As time goes on, senior management becomes frustrated with London's lack of progress and dig deep into the root cause. They discover what is going on and work with Matthew on eliminating any business risk of Jason leaving. When they have done this, they put in a new strategic leader to manage Jason and the platform rollout in London.

Eventually, Jason resigns.

What would have happened if Jason had stretched his thinking to see the big picture and became a strategic change champion?

## What About You?

There will come a pivotal time in your career when you need to stretch your thinking and associated actions away from delivery and towards strategic leadership.

As a strategic leader, you are expected to:

- Understand and communicate the strategic direction.
- Act with integrity and in the company's best interest by focusing less on outputs and more on outcomes.

- Ensure decisions made by you and others align with the strategic direction whilst applying a tactical course of action if practically required.
- Serve as a thought leader within your area of expertise.
- Drive your strategic leadership agenda.

Here are five coaching questions to start to stretch your thinking:

1. How are you developing your knowledge inside and outside of the company to ensure you can make more informed strategic decisions and impact?

2. What inspiring and strategically aligned vision can you create and get buy-in for that solves a problem, inefficiency, or potential future risk?
3. What habit can you put in place that triggers you to think more about outcomes than outputs?
4. How can you create space and time for yourself to think strategically?
5. What resources do you need to develop as a strategic leader?

## Mistake #2

### YOU DON'T CHANGE YOUR WAYS OF WORKING

*“Always remember, your focus determines your reality.”*

*George Lucas*

Jai is a dedicated family man with a beautiful wife and two young children who are both the apple of his eye.

He is highly driven and works hard to succeed but will always spend the evenings and weekends with his family. The only time he will compromise on this is if there is a work emergency.

He works for a company experiencing accelerated growth, which means there are plenty of exciting opportunities for ambitious high performers.

Under his leadership, his current area of responsibility is outperforming the others. If he continues to perform like this and take on more responsibility, he will be up for a promotion next year.

Jai is beyond happy. He has a challenging, well-paid job which he loves and a great relationship with his young family. Life couldn't be better.

One morning in September, Jai's boss, Ian, stopped by his desk and asked him to come into his office.

Ian shut the door behind Jai as he entered so they could talk privately. Jai sat down in the chair opposite his boss's desk, his back was straight, and he was focused intently on what his boss was about to say.

Ian sat down in his seat with his elbows and forearms resting on his desk and his hands crossed. He then started to talk.

"Jai, you have done an amazing job in your area. The clients have nothing but praise for the work you and your team have done for them. With that in mind, I would like to offer you some additional responsibility."

"I would like you to take over another area where we are struggling to deliver and get the clients back

on our side. With your track record, I am sure you can turn this area around."

"What do you say?"

Jai was overjoyed. This additional responsibility would give him the platform he needed for promotion.

"Ian, I appreciate the opportunity; I won't let you down" replied Jai.

Jai and Ian both smiled, stood up and shook hands. A definite and firm handshake. The type you see in a movie when two businessmen agree on a lifetime deal.

Jai went home that night excited to tell his wife about his new opportunity. His wife is overjoyed that he is recognised for all his hard work.

Over the next few weeks, Jai started to compromise on getting home before his children went to bed. Initially, it was one night a week, then two and then every workday. He even started to bring work home at the weekend.

He was tired, stressed, and his tolerance levels were so low that he started to snap at his children and argue with his wife. His relationships at home became stretched.

It was the same at work. There was a constant conflict with his new clients, and Jai's old clients that once sang his praise were now complaining as

they no longer got any attention from Jai or his team.

Jai also ran around the office like this hair was on fire, which his boss and other senior leaders observed. They started to think whether Jai would survive at the next level.

Jai is an intelligent guy, he knew he had to change his ways of working, but he isn't doing it. Something is holding him back. Something internal that is causing him to fail at work and home.

In Jai's case, it is a fear of letting go of the detail and control.

Jai must find a way to gradually delegate to others in his team to build up trust and finally let go of

control. Thus, allowing others to grow under his leadership and freeing up bandwidth for him to focus on what he should be doing.

He also must understand that he no longer needs to know all the answers but can refer to his subject matter experts when required in meetings or presentations, allowing others in his team to raise their profile.

Letting go of the details and control is a risk for Jai, but one he must undertake in a way that makes him comfortable to succeed in the long run.

The good news is that Jai decided to change his ways of working, built a small leadership team he could delegate to and let go of the detail.

After three months of Jai focusing on the relationships with his clients while coaching his team to do the rest, he is back on a promotion path.

But more importantly, he is getting home before his children's bedtime and has regained his extraordinary relationship with his family.

## What About You?

Time and resources are fixed - there are only so many hours in a day and there is just one of you. But your scope is increasing as the demands on you increase during an exponential transition. The only thing you can do is prioritise where you focus by stepping out of the weeds where you operate today.

## 5 Levels of Focus

David Rock, an Australian consultant and author, created a model that helps leaders to focus their energy and time in the right areas.

The model is broken down into five levels:

1. Vision
2. Planning
3. Details
4. Problems
5. Drama

As a leader, you should focus on vision and planning while stepping in and out of the details when required.

If you are spending your time in the lower levels, you are generally reactive and not proactive. The downside of being reactive is that others control your time and energy and not you.

What I have found, though, is that even though you know all this, there are opposing forces at work that keep you working in the other levels.

The most common are:

- Drawn back to your expert zone.
- FOMO.
- Like being the hero and go to person.
- Losing control - deadlines, easier to do it myself, don't have the time.
- You are passionate about the subject matter or solutioning.

- You are in a hurry, or you have anxious people above you that expect you to always know in minute detail what's going on.
- Your team is inexperienced.

Here are 5 coaching questions to challenge your ways of working:

1. What are the implications on you, your career, and your relationships if you don't change your ways of working?
2. What are you missing by not being future focused?
3. What would good look like if you changed your ways of working?

4. What action can you take to move more of your focus to the vision and planning levels?
  
5. Who can you coach to fill the gaps you start leaving behind?

## Mistake #3

### YOU DON'T MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONS

*“Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom.”*

*Victor E. Frankel Marshall Goldsmith*

Gary's boss Stephanie is asked to take on more responsibility. In turn, she asks Gary to take on more for her. Gary now must manage the relationships of multiple clients rather than just the one he works with today.

It is a big jump, but he is fired up for the opportunity to show what he can do.

During their 1-2-1s, Stephanie helps Gary build his client expectation management skills to ensure the teams can manage the workload and deliver on their commitments.

All seems to be going well, and Stephanie focuses on her new responsibilities believing that Gary is successfully managing her existing relationships.

But after about six months, noise begins to grow, both from the clients and the teams.

The teams are complaining that they now must work late nights and weekends to meet Gary's commitments. They are also annoyed that Gary is being unreasonable and not listening to their feedback.

The clients are escalating that Gary does not deliver what he commits to and, when challenged, becomes defensive and, in some cases, aggressive.

Stephanie could see Gary was tired and stressed, so instead of setting up a meeting in her office, which would worry Gary even more, she instead invites Gary out for a coffee and chat.

Over coffee, they talk about what was going on. After a long conversation, Stephanie discovers that Gary struggles to manage his emotions well, impacting his behaviour and decision making, especially around commitments.

Together they create a plan to recalibrate the priorities so the teams can deliver within working hours, and Stephanie accompanies Gary to give the

difficult messages to the clients. It's not pleasant and has a reputational hit on them both.

Stephanie also asks Gary if he would like to engage with a leadership coach who can help him manage his emotions and behaviour. Gary agrees, and the coaching begins.

Stephanie has regular catch-ups with the teams and clients until the noise dies down.

A few months later, she receives an email from a client saying that Gary adds a significant impact to her organisation and is a delight to work with.

Stephanie forwards the email to Gary and tells him that she is very pleased with how he has turned things around.

## What About You?

As demands on you grow exponentially, your leadership performance is impacted if you fail to understand and manage your emotions and those of other people.

As you see with Gary, emotions can temporarily impact your rational thinking and make you behave in ways you may regret later.

Gary worked on his emotional intelligence with his leadership coach, especially in self-awareness and self-regulation, i.e., recognising his emotions and holding himself back from his first impulse whilst choosing his positive response.

There are five fundamental areas to emotional intelligence (EQ):

- **Self-Awareness:** Ability to recognise and understand your emotions.
- **Self-Regulation:** Ability to choose how you react to your emotions/not suppress them.
- **Self-Motivation:** Ability to push yourself forward in challenging situations.
- **Empathy:** Ability to identify and understand how others feel.
- **Social Skills:** Ability to build strong relationships by recognising and managing the emotions of others and influencing them positively.

There is some correlation between these fundamental areas, so building strength in one area will impact the others.

Here are five coaching questions to help you manage your emotions:

1. What are the common triggers that cause you to react in a way you don't like?
2. How would you like to act when these triggers occur?
3. How can you interrupt yourself from responding to these common triggers and respond the way you would like to act instead?

4. How can you stay in tune with your emotions during a busy day?
  
5. Who can give you honest feedback about your behaviour?

## Mistake #4

### YOU DON'T UPGRADE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

*Every company has two organisational structures: The formal one is written on the charts; the other is the everyday relationship of the men and women in the organisation.”*

*Harold S Geneen*

Jess's boss, Graham, decides to take on a different role in the company and Jess is asked as Graham's successor to transition into his role.

Jess is excited about the transition and a little anxious as she now has massive shoes to fill.

Jess's area is a strategic core area that supports her clients and clients of her dependent peers.

As she starts to plan for the following year with her leadership team, she realises that she is losing sponsorship for her strategic roadmap.

She does not understand why. She and her leadership team have met all their commitments, and client satisfaction is high.

Jess speaks to her boss Antoinette about it.

Antoinette tells her that Graham has built strong relationships with his dependent peers and their clients and stakeholders. Ensuring his strategic agenda and roadmap are always visible, agreed and backed by all the sponsors.

Unfortunately, Jess did not get enough sponsorship for the following year. This impacted her roadmap, teams, and her compensation.

After that, Jess ensured she upgraded her relationships and increased her circle of influence and sponsorship the following year.

## What About You?

Upgrading your relationships through any transition is key to you and your team's success in the future.

Relationships at the right level will allow you to:

- Increase your circle of influence.
- Overcome organisational impediments in dependent areas.
- Increase your leadership and professional skills by working with and observing others at the next

level.

- Build a powerful support network.
- Help others do the same.

Here are five coaching questions to help you upgrade your relationships:

1. Who do you need to know now and in 12 months?
2. Who do your team need you to know?
3. Who do you need visibility with to ensure you are considered for your boss's replacement in the future?

4. How can you put a process in place around creating and building the right relationships?
  
5. How can you apply the same strategies to your private life?

## Mistake #5

### YOU DON'T COUNTERBALANCE THE DEMANDS ON YOU

*“The key is not to prioritise what’s on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.”*

*Stephen Covey*

James is ambitious but values time with his family more. His children are quickly becoming teenagers who will not want to spend as much time with him soon.

Although James leaves home for his difficult commute at 5 am, he is always home before 7 pm to ensure he gets time with his family. He never works weekends or late unless it is business-critical to do so.

Although James is physically present at home, he does not switch off. His mind is often focused on work, and he is constantly checking his phone when it pings. James is always in a state of anxiety, wondering what is going on with his global teams and clients whilst ensuring he is available if a problem occurred.

One evening, James is standing in the hallway at the bottom of his stairs. His young daughter, who was about five years old at the time, is standing at the top of the stairs.

His phone pinged and vibrated, and he started to read the work email. The email instantly stresses him out and puts him in a bad mood. At the same time, his daughter asked him a question.

He snaps immediately at her, and she starts to cry. It breaks his heart.

He feels like an idiot. His beautiful little girl with a heart of gold did not deserve that. From that day forward, he moved all his work apps off his phone and onto an iPad which he put straight in the drawer after work.

He also ensured that when a work thought came into his head, he dealt with it by writing it down on his to-do list and taking care of it during work hours.

After a while, James's anxiety disappeared at home and work never made his daughter cry again. Well, only when he travelled to other global offices which he kept to a minimum.

## What About You?

When I talk about counterbalancing the demands on you, I view this as work and life demands.

During an exponential transition, your life is usually in a change as well, i.e., you get married and become a parent.

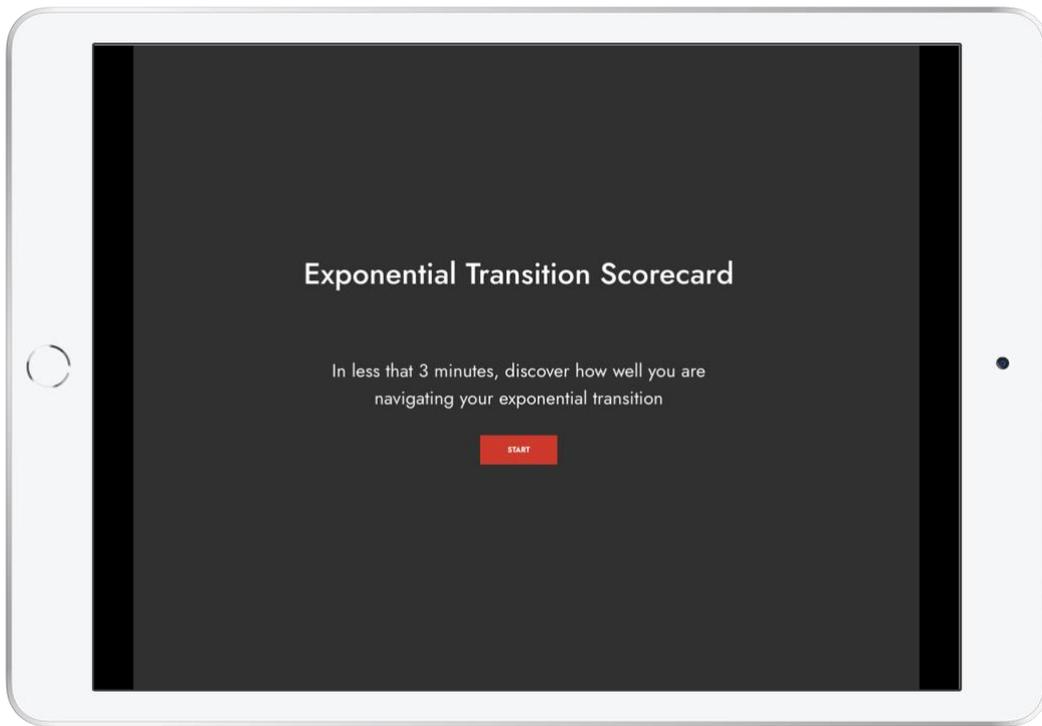
During this transition, it is critical that you find the time, energy and presence for your family, friends, close colleagues, and activities that re-energise you.

If you don't, then it will impact your health (physical or mental) and relationships.

Here are 5 coaching questions to counterbalance the demands on you:

1. What daily habits can you put in place that will improve your mental and physical health?
2. What energy and timewasters can you avoid or reduce?
3. How can you optimise your time at work and at home?
4. What work-based and home-based boundaries can you put in place?
5. How can you be more present in every interaction?

# Exponential Transition Scorecard



In less that 3 minutes, discover how well you are navigating your exponential transition - [Click Here](#)



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