



Workplace change for managers

Change is a word that inspires both fear and hope. Today's business environment is constantly evolving as it adjusts to market trends, new competition and technology, global crises such as pandemics, etc. Restructuring, outsourcing, downsizing, changing priorities and shifting to virtual work are all commonplace in today's environment.

There is a certain comfort to be found in the routine and the familiar. When those things are the subject of change (or even the potential subject of change), it can be easy to succumb to emotions such as fear, anxiety, denial, anger and sadness. Change involves saying goodbye to the old normal as you knew it. But, if we immediately assume the worst, we're merely focusing on loss. The reality is that change can also bring great opportunity.

How can the opportunity be found? Accept that change involves a period of uncertainty. You were used to the way things were. You knew your role and how to do it well. Now you are exploring what your new normal will look like. This phase is characterised by discomfort, but also creativity. Maintaining a flexible mindset can help you consider diverse perspectives, and new creative opportunities can be identified. People can have a wide range of emotions while they work through uncertainty, both positive and negative. Hope, anticipation, relief, denial that the change is happening, anger and sadness are very common.

Finally, change involves moving forward in a new way. Well-managed transitions help people clearly understand their new roles and establish a sense of purpose. This can be a time of excitement and renewal.

Ways to help yourself in a changing environment

- **Recognize that change is cyclical.** It starts with an ending, moves into a period of transition and leads to a new beginning. Think about past changes you have gone through. Identify the successful ways you coped.
- **Be kind to yourself and others.** Self-care is very important. Eat well. Get enough sleep. Connect with those you love. Be purposeful about taking breaks to unwind. Encourage others to do the same. Use your sense of humour. Be kind to someone. The mere act of doing for others is rewarding, and chances are, it will also enrich the relationship with that other person.
- **Keep a good attitude.** While you may not be able to affect the changes that are taking place, you are the master of your attitude. Your enthusiasm for work, even if you are not enthusiastic about the changes taking place, can serve to ease stress for both yourself and your co-workers. As the adage goes, when the wind begins to blow, it is better to bend as the willow than be stiff as the oak. The same is true for the changing workplace. Remaining flexible can make the difference between the change being a positive experience and a negative one.
- **Avoid negative thinking.** You may have thoughts such as: "Why are they doing this to us?" When circumstances beyond our control change in an unexpected way, we may feel resentful. Try to take a more positive approach to the changes. Tomorrow's successful organisations are the ones that successfully address change today.
- **Control what you can.** Try not to stress over things that are out of your control, including how your co-workers are reacting to change. Focus on your own reactions and behaviour.

- **Remember:** It's not personal. It is very important to remember the decision to instigate change is not a reflection on you. It's a business decision on the company's part.
- **Be clear about how the changes affect your role.** Changes in the workplace often push people into new roles, departments and/or work environments. Ask your supervisor for clarification on your new job duties and responsibilities. Look for ways to develop your skill set.
- **Do your job well.** In a crisis period, you can lend stability to the workplace by showing your co-workers that life – and work – go on. Working to the best of your ability while maintaining a positive attitude will no doubt leave a positive lasting impression, whether you have worked for someone for two days or two decades.

Ways to help others in a changing environment

- **Be patient.** Understand that change is a process. Support employees as they move through saying goodbye to the way things were, navigating uncertainty and moving forward in the new way.
- **Communicate with your employees.** Share information such as why the change is needed, what is changing and by when the change will be made. Get employee input wherever possible. Those closest to the change may have creative ideas that can strengthen the change. Also, if they are involved in the process, they may be more committed. Listening can be as important as speaking. It helps others feel involved, heard and valued.
- **Provide clear and concise expectations.** Make sure your employees are clear regarding the change timeline, expectations for an adjustment period and understanding of their new role/responsibilities.
- **Celebrate successes and accomplishments.** Publicly acknowledge and praise good work. Celebrate “victories” big or small. Incentivise and reward success.



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