

Strategies for Managing Change

1. Recognize Emotions

While we need to be appropriate and careful about how we discuss emotions in the workplace, the reality is that the brain is always impacted by emotions. Accepting this neurological fact can help us become more effective at recognizing emotions in ways that allow us to move through change more effectively. This does not mean we should play the role of a psychologist, but acknowledging emotions normalizes them and helps people work through their resistance.

2. Sort Your Losses

(See separate document)

3. Create Structure

It can be helpful to come up with a routine or structure while you're working through a transition to help you deal with the disequilibrium you might experience in the Endings and Neutral Zone.

Team Example: A reorganization was announced but the new structure wasn't determined for a month. The team "created structure" by focusing on completing a couple necessary but not urgent projects that had been put off for a few months. The temporary structure of working on these projects helped the team get through the time of uncertainty.

Personal Example: An individual joined a team and there was only a general idea about what her role would be. Until the role was clarified she set up a schedule of meetings to both learn about roles of different individuals on her team and within the organization and to build relationships with these people. She also conducted research on the history of the organization and their work.

4. Conduct a Reality Check

This is about discussing and sorting out what's actually changing from what individuals think and/or fear could change. Endings and Neutral Zone can be difficult in part because of all the things people worry might happen and conducting a reality check is a way to clarify the differences.

5. Appreciate What Was

This is about honoring the past and affirming what helped the individual, team or organization get to where it is. Deliberately acknowledging and appreciating what was can help individuals, teams and organizations let go and move forward. When this doesn't happen it can trigger a feeling that whatever went before was a mistake or waste of time, and that will diminish motivation to change and move forward.

6. Imagine the Future

Creating a compelling vision of the future is one of the key characteristics a leader must have to inspire others to join them. It is important for the leader or manager to create a positive vision of what the future will be like to help followers feel inspired to move forward.

7. Clarify Your Focus

When someone tries to take action on things that are not in their control, they are often spinning their wheels, represented by the upper right quadrant. A great deal of energy is spent and wasted here in change. When someone takes a wait and see approach on things that are in their control they miss opportunities, represented by the lower left quadrant. These are the two areas where we do not want to focus our efforts and energy.

Taking a wait and see approach on things that are not in your control, or letting go, is represented by the lower right quadrant, and taking action on things that are in your control, which is an effective use of energy, is represented by the upper left quadrant. Analyzing which quadrants our behavior and energy is being directed can help reduce resistance and increase productivity.

8. Reward Yourself or Others

Working through changes and transitions, especially significant ones, are challenging. It is affirming and helpful for future changes to acknowledge and celebrate this work. All too often individuals, teams and organizations move on to the next thing without acknowledging or recognizing what's been achieved, which can reduce future motivation.