

CHANGE MANAGEMENT RESOURCE PACKET

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HEALTHFUL WAYS TO MANAGE CHANGE

We live in a constantly changing world. "In this present environment, it can be challenging to retain a sense of control, especially if you're someone who likes to maintain the status quo," says psychologist Elizabeth Stirling, Ph.D., a change coach in Santa Fe, N.M.

In general, says Dr. Stirling, it's more difficult to react to change that happens to you, such as getting laid off or experiencing a health scare. But the change you initiate, such as switching jobs or moving, also can be difficult.

"The unknown is always a little scary," says Dr. Stirling, especially if you haven't done a lot of changing previously, or if change wasn't fostered during your upbringing. "But personal change can become easier if you adopt a positive attitude and an environment that diminishes the fear of the unknown and heightens your sense of adventure," she says.

Dr. Stirling offers the following tips for riding the waves of change with your health intact.

Solidify your support

To cope with change effectively, align yourself with a supportive group and nurture relationships with friends and family members with positive outlooks. "You need cheerleaders, people who are going to encourage you when change happens," says Dr. Stirling. "When someone says your new job sounds exciting, your confidence gets a boost."

Look on the bright side

With many changes come excitement, a sense of adventure and the opportunity for personal growth. If possible, "tap into the benefits of change," says Dr. Stirling. "Ask yourself: 'What will I gain by making this change?'" Even negative changes offer opportunities for learning. Overall, staying positive can help you reach your potential and recover faster from setbacks. But seek counseling through your EAP if change occurs and you're chronically anxious about it or stuck in the grieving process after several months.

Flex your change muscles

Change gets easier when you do it often, so force yourself to experience enjoyable change frequently, especially if you haven't changed much in a while or you feel stuck in a rut. You might, for example, take a different route to work every other week, get involved in a new hobby or enroll in a class that interests you.

Stay in good physical shape

Before and during times of change, it's important to stay in good physical shape and not let your eating habits slide. "Healthy nutrition and regular exercise can help your body support you," says Dr. Stirling. If you experience a major health setback, for example, you'll be in a stronger position to recover. And you'll also feel more psychologically prepared to cope with change. By eating healthfully and exercising regularly, you'll gain a sense of personal control that can translate to the change at hand.

Claremont distributes this information to provide employees with general behavioral health information. If you have concerns about these or other behavioral health issues, you can call Claremont to arrange for assistance. You will be directed to an appropriate, experienced professional who can offer guidance in a variety of work and personal matters. **For confidential help, call Claremont at 800-834-3773.**

COPING WITH WORKPLACE CHANGE

Change evokes fear in most people because of the uncertainty it presents. People wonder: Will I be adequate for this new position? Will I be able to get along with my new boss? Will the corporation my company is merging with allow me to keep my job? "Major changes, such as new management, downsizing or a company buyout, can result in a feeling of panic," says Susan Starr, a human resource consultant and owner of H2O Marks, a Dallas-based marketing company.

Understanding change

When you have a routine, you know what to expect, and even if it's difficult or boring, it's consistent and reliable. You have learned how to do your work and deal with the people who work with you. But when something changes, suddenly your routine is broken and you no longer know what to expect.

Even if the change is for the better, the transformation can be difficult. For example, when one company installed a new phone system, a frustrated employee exclaimed, "I know it will be so much better once I get used to it, but right now the phones are driving me crazy."

It is the same with any kind of change. There is a period of adjustment until you feel the consistency that builds trust and confidence. During this time, you may feel disoriented, frustrated, angry and powerless. The best time to prepare for any change is when things are running smoothly. That way, you'll have time to plan ahead.

One way to do so is to practice the following four A's of coping with change:

Awareness: Since uncertainty about the future creates the most fear and stress during a change, try to find as much information as you can about your situation. Whom can you ask? What can you learn? What research can you do? The more you learn, the less uncertainty you'll experience. Behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed will help you cope with change.

Acceptance: You may not like the change, but if you accept the fact that it is the way it is, instead of fighting it or complaining about it, you'll feel less frustrated. "It's important to accept transformations with grace and a sense of looking forward to a new experience," says Ms. Starr.

Attitude: Are you being fearful or are you thinking about the possibilities for improvement change might bring? To focus on the positive aspects of your change, write a list of all the possible positive outcomes.

Even though minor changes can cause stress and frustration, the good news is that any change can be an opportunity for something positive to happen. What's more, when you learn how to cope effectively with minor changes at work, you'll develop the skills and positive outlook necessary to help you deal with a major change.

Action: This is where you do have some control over the situation. It's how you prepare and respond to change. The following positive actions can help you cope.

- Develop a network. Your network will be a valuable resource in times of change.
- Learn new skills. Learn a new computer program. Take a class in communication skills. Learn to make presentations. Ongoing training will add skills to your professional tool kit.
- Change your surroundings. Do what you can to make your work area pleasant and comfortable.
- Ask action questions. Whom can you talk to if a situation is getting more difficult to cope with? How can you get to know a new boss or coworker? What ideas can you present to your company that will help with the change?

"The key to coping with change is resilience," says Ms. Starr. "Resilience means knowing how to survive and making the best of change in spite of setbacks, barriers or limited resources."

THE POWER OF RESILIENCE

When tragedy strikes with the death of a loved one, a serious illness or a job loss, some people fall apart, while others adapt to such life-changing events more easily. Being resilient is what makes the difference.

"Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy or significant stress -- it means bouncing back from difficult experiences," says Patricia O'Gorman, Ph.D., a psychologist in private practice in East Chatham, N.Y., and a spokeswoman for the American Psychological Association. "We all share a special ability to take charge of our lives. This is what resilience can give us -- the ability to align ourselves with our strengths and to recognize our personal power."

Resilience is used to describe people who lead normal, fulfilling lives despite having experienced trauma or tragedy. These people are resilient because they have the ability to recover from adversity and retain a positive self-image and view of the world.

"People who are resilient accept that they have difficulties, but also know they have inner resources and abilities they have drawn on in the past," says Dr. O'Gorman. "This gives them a starting place that's positive, a place where they can search for solutions to their problems."

Building resilience

Resilience isn't a trait people either have or don't have -- it involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed. Here are some strategies for building resilience:

- Nurture a positive view of yourself. Develop confidence in your ability to solve problems and trust your instincts.
- Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems. "You can't prevent stressful events from happening, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events," says Dr. O'Gorman. "Try keeping a long-term perspective."
- Accept that change is a part of living. Certain goals no longer may be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that can't be changed can help you focus on circumstances you can affect.
- Look for opportunities for self-discovery. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship report better relationships, a greater sense of strength, an increased sense of self-worth and a greater appreciation for life.
- Make connections. Good relationships with family, friends or others are important. Accept help and support from those who care about you.
- Maintain a hopeful outlook. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect good things to happen in your life.
- Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly, get enough sleep, eat a healthful diet and limit alcohol consumption.

Consider writing your thoughts about stressful events in your life. Try meditation and other spiritual practices. Many people find these activities help them build connections with others and restore lost hope.

"Becoming conscious of your strengths makes you stronger," says Dr. O'Gorman. "Resilience increases as you recognize the magnitude of what you've already accomplished and survived in your life and helps you believe you can meet the challenges that lie ahead."

Getting help

Getting help when you need it is crucial in building resilience. "Beyond caring family members and friends, you may want to turn to support groups, mental health professionals [through your EAP] or spiritual advisers if you're not able to bounce back from a setback on your own," says Dr. O'Gorman.