Strategies for Managing Change in the Workplace

By: Leadership and Motivation Training

Strategies for Managing Change: Shock:

If you are bumping along and feeling all is well in the world and bam out of seeming left-field change is introduced ... well you may go into shock ... it may take a while for the concept of you needing to adjust to set in. You might experience several negative emotions such as distress, disgust, surprise, grief. Like a deer caught in headlights you may become paralyzed. Your performance may decline as you will possibly need time to make sense of and come to grips with your loss and sense of unease.

Your Leader can support you by:

- Listening and understanding your sense of loss.
- Feeding you information that reinforces why the change is important.
- Giving you the time and space to come to grips with the situation.
- In your own time and when you have the right 'head-space', encouraging you to ask questions.

Strategies for Managing Change: Confusion:

After some thinking time you are likely to have some confusion and many questions. Be prepared that your mind may be a little chaotic jumping from one 'what if' question to another. About now you are possibly being hit by many rumors and speculation about the change in the workplace and you'll be unsure exactly where the truth lays.

Your Leader can support you by:

- Providing you with as much information as possible.
- Keeping you focused with short-term objectives and goals, whilst at the same time helping you to see the bigger picture.
- Providing reassurance by taking as much time as is necessary to address issues and concerns (both with individuals and the bigger group) about the change in the workplace conditions.
- Help you to develop strategies for dealing with each of the stages of the change process.
- Stay close to the ground so s/he can quickly address any rumors that speed around

Strategies for Managing Change: Denial:

Somewhere between shock, confusion and anxiety often lays the buffer zone of denial. Not wanting to deal with all that is coming up you may find yourself denying that the change in the workplace will be of any consequence to you. You will look to other people and data to seek out evidence that the change is unnecessary and shouldn't have to occur.

Your Leader can support you by:

- Not expecting large leaps into acceptance.
- Allowing you sufficient time to face up to the change and its repercussions on you.
- Helping you to see that remaining in denial is risky - e.g. imagine if you were still using a manual typewriter and all your colleagues are using computers!

Strategies for Managing Change: Anxiety & Fear:

About now you've come to grips with the notion that the change is inevitable - yet the shape of the future may still be dark and murky for you. Questions like: *"How do I fit into this? Am I capable? Will it work for me?"* will all be running around in your mind. You may be unsure who, if anyone, to trust.

Your Leader can support you by:

- Communicating directly, honestly and calmly with you - not to whitewashing anything.
- Helping you to fully comprehend the meaning of the change for you and how much input you will have in the change process.
- Working with you to develop a brightness of future that **you** can look forward to.
- Not making any rash promises that can't be kept.
- Talking with you frequently to help you lessen the severity of the 'negative nellies' who may be pulling you down.
- Being like a beacon that helps to guide and navigate your way safely through the change in the workplace and glide into the future.

Strategies for Managing Change: Hostility:

Whilst denial is often something you do alone. If you become angry then it may mean that everyone knows about it. You may show your anger by active and/or passive resistance and full-frontal attacks.

Your Leader can support you by:

- Putting him/herself in your shoes and digging below the surface of the anger to find what's causing it.
- Ensuring there are plenty of avenues for issues, feelings and concerns to be vented.
- Empathizing with your feelings of anger, but not letting you get away with it: e.g. *"It's okay to be angry, but it's not okay to shout at others".*
- Understanding that if s/he keeps her mind clear and understands that when you feel you are listened to, respected and understood your anger will weaken, reduce and eventually probably disappear.
- As difficult as it may be, to not take your anger personally and avoid becoming angry or defensive him/herself.

Strategies for Managing Change: Resistance:

This will be the time when you'll catch yourself saying things like *"This will never work. This has been tried before, how's it any different this time? Why bother saying anything to anyone, they'll do what they want regardless of my input. It probably just means more work for me"*

Your Leader can support you by:

- Not asking you to snap out of it or pull yourself together - denying your feelings may only drive them deeper.
- Keep furnishing you with an abundance of information about the change in the workplace
- Keep you up to speed with timeframes for when and how the change will take place.
- Not pushing advice on you - this might deepen your resistance.
- Involving you as much as you want to be involved - the more you feel you have some control over the change the more your resistance will lessen.

Strategies for Managing Change: Sadness:

Whether you see the change as positive or negative, as you leave behind the familiar past, you may experience some sadness. This is normal. It helps you to understand how much you really care about something.

Your Leader can support you by:

- Encouraging you to discuss your feelings and what may be triggering them.
- Helping you to find ways to manage your feelings and thinking patterns.
- Encouraging you to take time for physical exercise, rest and healthy eating.
- Providing support so you can get professional assistance if your sadness begins to show the symptoms of depression.

Strategies for Managing Change: Stress:

Stress occurs when you feel like you have no control. You may become ill. The most harmful kind of stress is social isolation, particularly if you are the only person who is feeling negative about the change.

Your Leader can support you by:

- Helping you to find the support you need - whether this is family, work mates, friends or by providing access to professional counseling.
- Putting you in touch with stress reduction resources such as meditation, relaxation tapes, breathing techniques etc.