

How to Make Changes at Work, Work for You

By Jim Dawson

No matter how we feel about it, the one thing we can always count on is that things are going to change. What we may not realize is that how we handle change affects the quality of our lives. Whether it is a new CEO, market opportunity, corporate vision, product line, or job responsibility, any change in our work life can generate strong emotions. We may feel joy, hope, and enthusiasm. But more often change frightens us. If we aren't ready for it, we can become anxious, depressed, or angry.

When we learn how to manage change effectively, we become less afraid of the unknown and more excited about the opportunities it may bring. We also become a greater asset to our organization and to those around us.

When it Happens, What Can I Do?

First of all, understand that there is nothing wrong with feeling uncomfortable when your patterns and routines are disrupted. It's human nature to prefer a certain amount of stability and predictability. When a change at work threatens your sense of security, think about some of the changes you've been through that you initially resisted but later embraced because you saw the benefits. It may not have been easy, but things did get better. From this point of view, you can make a more objective assessment of the current situation. By asking yourself "What can I do?" rather than "Why me?" you will be well on your way to making change work for you.

The Four Stages of Change

An awareness of the four stages of the change process will help you manage your expectations and your personal response to it more effectively.

Change

The change event happens. In this stage, emotions are heightened. A lot of people fear change because don't know what it is all about. If the individuals affected by the change don't understand or agree with the reasons for it, they may feel anxiety, dread, or resentment.

Resistance

Once the initial emotional response is over there is usually a period of resistance. During this stage you may hear, "This will never work." "They don't have a clue what they are doing." "The way we used to do it worked just fine!" "I'm not going to do this unless I have to." "They'll have to prove it to me first!"

Compliance

In this stage people begin doing things the "new way" even though they are still feeling some resistance. They may say, "I don't like it but I'll do it." "I'll go along with this for now because it will never last." "O.K., I'll do it but I don't agree."

Acceptance

The new way of doing things becomes the norm. In fact, the new norm has become "the good old way" that people cling to when the next change comes along.

With a general understanding of how people move through change, there are four specific steps you can take to benefit from the changes around you.

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