



6 ways to deal successfully with change at work

Just as the seasons change from spring to summer, autumn to winter, so change at work is inevitable. Significant changes in the workplace can have a huge impact on our morale, motivation, health, wellbeing, and performance. Here are our 6 top tips for dealing successfully with change at work. We hope they'll help you to be more resilient and positive, and to make the most of the opportunities which change can create.

1. Change happens – get used to it!

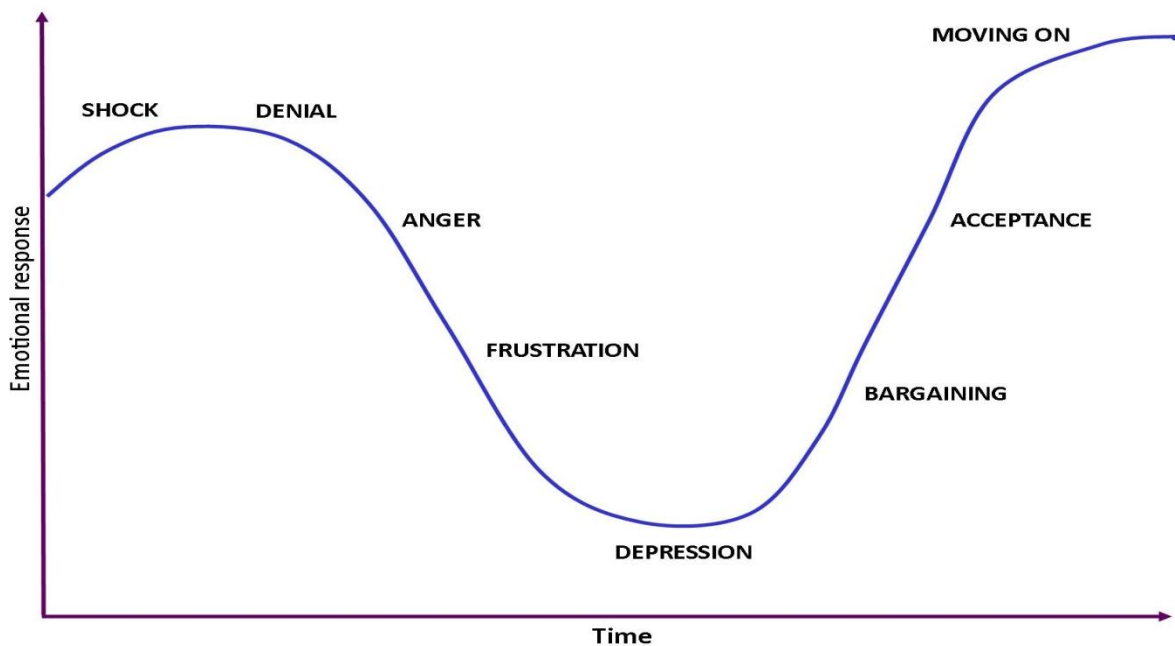
The old proverb says “Change is the only constant”. If we are to understand and deal with change positively we must accept its inevitability. Nothing stays the same. In companies, people, teams, families and life, change takes place all the time. Sometimes we are lucky enough to have control over the change, but mostly we don't, so we just have to accept it and make the best of it.

If you are using lots of energy protesting against change, ask yourself why? Will it make any difference? Why not use your energy to work with the change and create positive opportunities for yourself and others instead?

2. Understand your reactions to change

When we experience major changes, we go through similar emotional stages as we do when we experience a bereavement. These emotions are perfectly normal but it's important not to let them get the better of you. If you know what emotional stage you are at, you can look at what you can do for yourself, or what support you may need from others, in order to move on. It's important to experience the different stages, but the quicker you get to the acceptance and moving on stages, the less stressful it will be for you. You may not go through all the stages, you may not go through them in order, and you may find you spend different amounts of time at each stage, but recognising and understanding where you're at is a huge step towards moving forward. Think about how you are feeling and recognise where you are in this process. Then identify and write down the actions you can take and what help/support you need from others to help you move towards acceptance and moving on.

The stages are:



Shock

An unexpected change can result in you feeling shock. This can make you feel paralysed and your performance may decline while you take time to make sense of and come to grips with your feelings of loss, unease and anxiety.

Denial

Denial is a conscious or unconscious refusal to accept the facts of the situation. It's a defence mechanism and perfectly natural, but you can become locked in this stage which becomes damaging to yourself, to others, and to the company.

Anger and Frustration

Anger can manifest in different ways, whether its withdrawing, shouting, crying or being short-tempered. You may be angry with yourself and/or with others, especially those you see as responsible for the changes. You may also get frustrated as a result of feeling powerless . There may be lots of rumours and speculation about the changes, and it becomes hard to know what's true and what isn't and who to trust.

Depression and detachment

You may feel sadness and regret, fear, and uncertainty. This is a sign that you have begun to accept the reality. You may struggle to focus on doing your work, or on dealing with other people, and you may feel a deep sense of loss of the things which were important to you.

Dialogue and bargaining

This is the stage where you feel that you can bargain with others regarding the changes, or negotiate a compromise, for example "Can we still do some of it the old way?" Bargaining rarely provides a sustainable solution but is a last ditch attempt to regain some control over the situation or to reduce the impact of the changes.

Acceptance

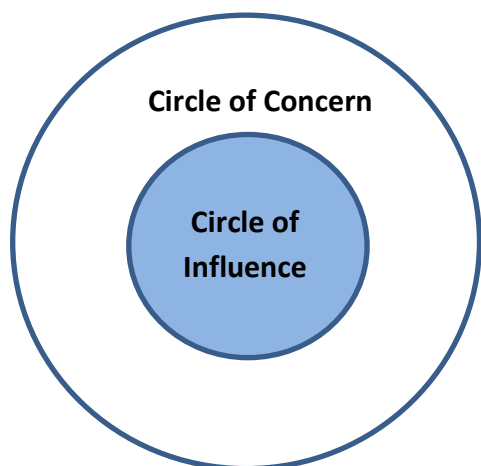
At this stage, you will find that you have become more emotionally detached from the situation, and can focus on the reality of it an objective way. This means that you have accepted the changes and come to terms with what they mean for you.

3. Get Informed

One of the biggest causes of stress during periods of change is lack of knowledge and understanding about the changes – how they will work, who they will affect, how they will affect you, why they are taking place and so on. Don't just sit back and wait for information while your stress levels spiral out of control – be proactive and seek the information you need. Talk to your manager, your manager's manager, HR, co-workers, or people from other teams to find out what they know and improve your understanding. Do however be aware that information may be distorted and rumours abound during times of great change, so be discerning about who you talk to.

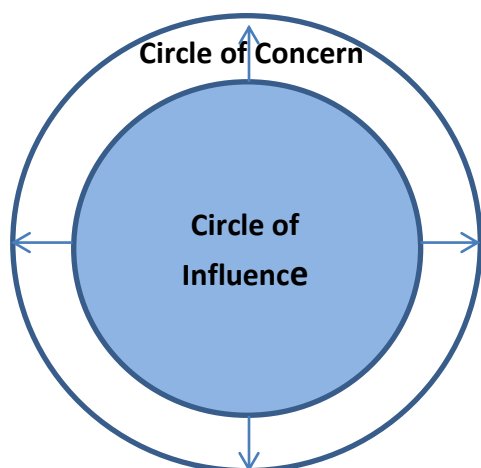
If you don't know how the change will affect you and are afraid of the unknown, why not talk to others who have experienced similar change (especially people from outside your company). What difficulties did they experience and how did they deal with them? What can you learn from them?

4. Take Control



During periods of change, we tend to focus on all the things we can't change, making us feel out of control and anxious. Instead, we need to focus on the things we can actually do something about, which makes us feel more empowered and in control.

Within our lives and work we have a wide range of concerns, some of which we can influence and some we can't. Draw a circle to represent all the things which are concerns for you. This is your circle of concern. Inside this, draw another circle to represent all the concerns which you can actually have an influence over. This is your circle of influence.



Now, think about all your concerns, and identify which ones you can do something about. Decide how you can be more proactive and address the things that you can influence. Your circle of influence will enlarge and your circle of concern will shrink.

By focusing your energy and attention on doing something about the things you can control within your circle of influence rather than those things you have no control over, you'll feel more empowered and positive rather than feeling like a victim or blaming others.

You can find out more about this in Stephen Covey's brilliant book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People"

5. Manage your thoughts

Your thoughts directly affect how you feel. The words you say and think generate particular emotions (if you think "this change won't work, it's a waste of time", you'll feel angry and frustrated). These feelings then directly affect your behaviour (if you feel angry about the change, you'll make critical statements about the people you consider to be responsible for the change). This behaviour leads to more negative thoughts or statements, resulting in a negative cycle which is damaging both for you and for others.

If you manage your thoughts, you can generate more positive feelings and behaviour, making it easier to deal with the changes.

For example, if you have a *negative thought* about something, (such as getting a new line manager as a result of the changes) you will experience negative feelings such as anger, resentment or sadness. These will result in negative behaviour towards the new manager which in turn leads to more negative thoughts and so on.



Alternatively, you can make a conscious effort to have a *positive thought* about something, (such as “there may be some benefits in this for me”), which will result in you having positive feelings such as happiness, excitement, or satisfaction. This will then make you behave in a more positive way which leads to more positive thoughts and so on.

6. Look after Yourself

During times of anxiety and stress, it's easy to stop looking after ourselves. We may drink more alcohol than usual, eat more chocolate, and feel too fed up to exercise. However it's during these difficult times when looking after ourselves becomes even more important. To be mentally strong and emotionally resilient, we need to be physically healthy, so do try to eat healthily, drink plenty of water, and get regular exercise. Practicing a few simple relaxation techniques will also help you you feel less stressed. For ideas, download our free “De-Stress at your Desk” resource from www.salt-box.co.uk

And finally..... we hope you've found these ideas helpful. To find out more about how we can help you or your colleagues to deal with change, visit www.salt-box.co.uk or email us at info@salt-box.co.uk or call 01749 687357