

CHANGE: DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

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“Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.” ~ George Bernard Shaw

How much change have you experienced in the last year? Perhaps you've had to learn a complicated new accounting method or software system. You may have had to train new team members, have a change in your work hours or location, or have taken on a new role. You might have gone through a merger or an acquisition of your company. Change is routine in today's workplace and in everyday life. It can be extraordinarily challenging. Many of us do not like change, however we know change is inevitable. Without effective coping skills, change can greatly increase your stress and trigger powerful negative effects both physically and psychologically.

Some say coping is a "process by which an individual attempts to minimize the negative emotions that arise from the experience of negative events." Simply put, coping describes the way that we think about and deal with stressful events. It is often your attitude towards change and the meaning you attach to that change that determines your emotions and your experience of it. Some people see change in a positive light and embrace it as an opportunity to learn and grow. Others view change negatively as something to fear and to avoid.

How we choose to react to change will impact the positive or negative effects of the change we are dealing with. If you can embrace change and cope with it, you will be valued highly in your organization. You will be seen as a flexible and adaptable team player, and these characteristics can open up many opportunities. If you are someone who resists change consistently, you'll be seen as inflexible, a naysayer, and not seen as a team player.

It is important for us to know how to cope with change because it is pervasive in all aspects of our lives. Organizations are continuously growing, downsizing, merging, and acquiring new people and resources. Personally we deal with changes in our own relationships, finances, careers, and health issues, to name a few. We need to know how to cope with not only major changes, but smaller changes as well. Some changes are more difficult than others. The sudden uninvited changes that you don't expect are especially challenging. These are changes that are out of your control such as a parent or child becoming ill, your best friend moving out of town, or a natural disaster. However, how you deal with them is something that you can control! Long anticipated changes such as retirement, death of a parent and the newly "empty nest" can still be challenging. Again it is about how you choose to deal with the change that makes all the difference.

Change can bring amazing opportunities or it can bring defeat. Researchers Mel Fugate and Angelo J. Kinicki, authors of *"Fundamentals of Human Resource Management and Organization Behavior,"* argue that there are two major types of coping strategies: "control coping" and "escape coping."

"Control coping" is positive and proactive. Someone who is applying control coping refuses to feel victimized by the change and instead takes charge and does whatever is necessary to be part of the solution, including managing their feelings. "Escape coping" obviously is based on avoidance. Someone who is applying escape coping experiences thoughts and emotions, or takes specific actions that help avoid or escape the difficulties of change. For instance, showing up late to meetings where change is scheduled to be discussed or missing training classes that are addressing a change in procedures are routine examples of escape coping. Of course, control

coping is the healthier option to apply as it puts you in a position of positive control. Instead of reacting to or avoiding the change you are proactive in the search for a positive solution.

If you are anxious or overwhelmed with the changes swirling around you ask for help. Some changes you experience will become the “new normal.” The sooner you can accept that the change is permanent and move towards applying positive coping skills, the sooner you will enjoy the positive results!

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