Effectively Managing Life Changes

Change can be uncomfortable for a variety of reasons including: fear of the unknown; perceived risks; lack of control and information; the potential losses of routine and sense of security or potential losses of relationships and trust. It can also challenge our sense of competence and ability to cope if you feel like you don’t have the needed energy, skills, time or resources necessary to successfully navigate change. As a result, you may resist the change when faced with something new or different, whether it is personal or work related. The change you choose can be exciting but there also may be feelings of uncertainty or fear. The change we do not choose often intensifies feelings of anger, blame, and resentment.

All change requires an adjustment of some kind. Author William Bridges refers to this process of adjustment to change as a transition. Each one of us engages these transitions in our own time and as such you may not always find yourself in sync with others or the work organization. You may try to push through or feel pulled by those around you to move forward and adjust to the change as quickly as possible; however, if you take time to learn some new strategies to navigate the transition process, you increase your ability to effectively manage future changes. Since today’s world is full of rapid and almost constant change, learning to effectively manage life transitions becomes a critical skill to be mastered.

Some Helpful Strategies Include:

- **Increase your awareness of current patterns of coping** - Our current coping strategies may actually keep us stuck. Avoid unhealthy habits, such as use of alcohol / drugs, using food to console, buying things on impulse, sleeping in late, and calling in sick. It can be helpful to evaluate your emotional response by asking yourself the following questions:
  - Is the intensity of my reaction appropriate to the change?
  - Am I overreacting or misinterpreting?
  - Is there another way to look at this? Is there an opportunity here?
  - Are there aspects of this situation that I can control?
  - Would more information help me cope better with this change?

- **Challenge your perceptions** - If you think of change as something to avoid, or you take a “hunker down” approach (hoping it will blow over and things will get back to normal), try challenging those perceptions. Strive to view change as a natural and healthy part of life. After all, a company that doesn’t change is unlikely to grow and survive. Oftentimes, changing your perceptions and attitude are two of the best strategies for coping with change.

- **Increase your understanding of transitions and effective coping tools** – Transitions can be a roller coaster of emotions combined with the need to plan, re-plan and then prepare for a future of more change. Start by accepting what has changed, then stay focused on moving forward, look for the opportunities that come with every change, and ultimately build connections and a commitment to the future. It can help to become a “student” of change, using your Employee Assistance Program and other resources to learn as much as you can about the process. Knowledge and understanding can be two of your greatest tools.

- **Maintain personal resilience** - During times of change, remember that regular exercise, a balanced diet, and adequate sleep are needed to maintain your ability to cope. Utilizing support from family or friends, making every day meaningful, and being proactive are just a few of the resilience skills that can help you effectively manage life changes.

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