

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

How change impacts the team

Change is a necessary part of any organization and is integral to its success in a competitive and shifting market. When new technologies or trends sweep in, old routines are often phased out.

Upcoming generations are predicted to hold not only different jobs during their working life, but different careers, using different skill sets. Adaptability is quickly becoming the market expectation and the way to survival, especially in a down turned economy. Many organizations have had to restructure and cut back to keep afloat. When employees see cuts happening, it can be tempting to jump ship and seek out new opportunities. But what are organizations doing to retain their workforce during times of change?

If you are experiencing change within your organization, read on to understand how change and transitions can negatively impact a team if they are not managed properly, and how you can make change a positive experience within your organization.

Paint a big picture

If you've ever looked too closely at a painting, you know that you can't always make out the big picture when you're looking at individual strokes. Change can be frightening to employees who don't know why the shift is happening. They may see what is affecting them immediately but if they don't know the end result, or the steps needed to get there, the change can seem useless or daunting. When you paint the big picture for them—the results of the transition and what you're building together—you will gain more confidence in the process and garner enthusiasm and support. If your change involves cutbacks and restructuring, be honest about why it needs to happen. The survival of the organization is a goal to work towards and your staff needs to know this to understand why restructuring is necessary.

Car-pool on the information highway

Two-way communication during a time of change is the key to maintaining your employees trust and buy- in. Inform employees as early as possible about new policies, procedures or organizational changes. When you aren't being transparent about change, the most natural response is to assume something negative is happening. But whether the news is negative or not, being "in the know" keeps employees from feeling left out of the loop and less vulnerable to surprises, reducing stress and encouraging questions rather than gossip. Encourage two-way communication during times of change with:

- **Regular updates.** Take a moment to call your team together when you have new information to share. The fear of the unknown can make you feel like you're navigating in the dark. Keeping employees informed about the details helps them feel a part of the process and enables them to see the road ahead.

- **Q & As.** Encourage questions and provide honest answers during your meetings. Let employees know they can come to you if they want to speak 'offline' about their concerns. Ask them what they've heard and take the opportunity to bring rumours out in the open and clarify any misconceptions.

- **Map it out.** Setting clear, short-term goals will help motivate your employees to implement change and make the task less daunting and more achievable.

- **Recognition.** When a milestone is met, take time out to celebrate your team's accomplishments and recognize individuals for their special contributions. When employees feel they are making a difference and their work is recognized, morale improves and workers feel more personally invested in seeing the change through to the end.

Encourage involvement

Employees might feel powerless and irrelevant during a transition if they feel like they haven't been part of the process. Empower your employees by including them in the decision-making process as often as possible. Give them opportunities to become change leaders in their own right, implementing new policies and procedures and measuring success. Check-in, without micromanaging, to see how they are doing. Ask for their input and advice and encourage creative solutions for any issues that arise along the way.

Learn from experience

And it doesn't have to be your own. History tends to repeat itself. Don't repeat past mistakes made by your organization or another. Help your organization and employees understand change by talking to people who have already gone through it. Are you bringing in a new technology or procedure? Invite someone to come and speak to the team about a similar experience, what their frustrations and achievements were and how positive results were achieved. You can learn from others' mistakes and improve upon their accomplishments.

Note the negative, push the positive

Don't avoid the unavoidable. When there is negative change or a negative component to change and you're not honest in preparing your employees, you will lose their trust and respect and make the process much more difficult for everyone involved. Be honest about the negative, but offer something positive to balance the perspective. If there are layoffs, remaining staff may feel the crunch of being left with more work to do and fewer resources. Offer additional training, working from home days and encourage work- life balance. When operating on a smaller staff, reducing workplace stress should be a priority to retain them.

Evaluate success

Just because change has been implemented and the milestones met, it doesn't mean that the process of change is over. Managing change continues on after a new policy is put into place or the move to a new location is complete. Keep your eyes and ears open for signs of change-induced stress in staff. Has there been an increase in sick leave? Turnover? If there is a move, ask employees for feedback on the new space after an initial settling-in time. If there is a new service or technology in place, ask your employees for their feedback and the feedback from clients. Measure success and communicate it out to the team.

Successful organizations are constantly changing to stay relevant and competitive and to best meet the needs of their clients. Whether you are in a small or large organization, evolution is inevitable and getting on board with change is necessary for growth and diversification. But it doesn't have to happen at the cost of employees' health and morale. Help your staff prepare for and implement change by painting the big picture, sharing information, engaging them in the process and celebrating both individual and shared accomplishments. Change can be scary and upsetting, but it can also be an opportunity for developing staff and improving morale while working towards the organizations' success.

If you require support to deal with a sensitive employee situation, contact LifeWorks·fgi to find out more about the consultation and training services your Employee Assistance Program provides.

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please refer to your benefit material for more information. For immediate assistance, call 1.844.880.9137.