

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

A changing world: how are you managing?

It's a fact. Some people handle change better than others. While we recognize that no one has the absolute answers to coping with change, we'll look at some practical suggestions you can use to make the process go a little more smoothly for you.

Change is happening at a faster pace today. Global, technological, economic, and social shifts are all causing sweeping changes in our lives. Moreover, few of us see change coming. Either we are too wrapped up in the daily business of living to be aware of it, or we choose to take the ostrich's approach and bury our heads in the sand. The result is, of course, that we don't plan for change. In other words, the future is here before we know it.

1. Tune into change in the workplace and new trends in the world. Read publications related to your organization's business, and type of work. If you want to understand something about the future of our world, you'll find the following books well worth reading:

- The Age of Unreason by Charles Handy
- Megatrends 2000 by John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene
- 2020 Vision by Stan Davis and Bill Davidson

Remember, people who are aware that change is coming have a better chance to take advantage of the opportunities that change often presents.

2. Take control of change. Carol thinks that she may lose her job this year because her company is downsizing. Carol can worry and agonize or she can be proactive by doing some personal planning. For instance, Carol can find out what other jobs would be available to a person with her skills and experience. In fact, she might find it helpful to seek the advice of a career counsellor. People who take control of change have a chance to plan and consider their options. In other words, they are more likely to become managers of change instead of victims of change.

3. Don't overwhelm yourself with change. For instance, George, who is facing an early retirement should realize that he is not just saying goodbye to his job. This transition will trigger a chain reaction that will involve change in routines, relationships, and income. If George is planning to move, he might find it best to postpone relocating until he has adjusted to some of the other changes in his life.

4. Understand that adjustment to a major change takes time. Consider Don and Cathy who have recently moved into their dream home. They continually reminisce about the old neighbourhood and are beginning to wonder if moving was a mistake. Don and Cathy should go easy on themselves. It will take time for them to appreciate and reinforce their preferred choice of home. This will put their nostalgic feelings for the old neighbourhood into perspective.

5. Develop a positive attitude toward change. The experts tell us that our attitude toward change will affect our success at managing change. It's important to realize that one of the things over which each person has control is his or her attitude. In other words, you can choose to view change as a problem or as a challenge. Which employee do you think is more likely to be able to cope with change: The one who says, " I can't do this," or the one who says, "I've succeeded in the past and I'll succeed now?"

6. Boost your self-esteem. "People who see change as opportunity and trust their ability to deal with it and enhance their lives, as a result of it, are able to do so because of higher levels of self- esteem,"says Shad Helmstetter in his book, You Can Excel in Times of Change. He goes on to say that positive self-esteem comes primarily from one of these three sources: "Hearing good things about yourself; Thinking good things about yourself; Doing something that you are proud of."

7. Be aware that change brings stress. In other words, be alert to physical, mental, and emotional signs of stress. Even the hardiest people may experience stress reactions, such as feelings of depression and isolation when change is too rapid. It is important to identify coping strategies that have worked before, for example, joining a self-help group or organization where people find it helpful to be with others who are going through a similar experience.

8. Take care of yourself. Remember that the more attention you pay to proper nutrition, adequate rest, and regular exercise, the easier it will be for you to cope with the demands of change.

9. Use humour. Terry L. Paulson, Ph.D. author of Making Humour Work suggests using humour to handle the early discomfort of change in the workplace. He says, "Laughing together allows all to say,

'We're all in this together, and we're all uncomfortable'."

10. Turn to others for support. As you go through a change, it's important to turn to others for advice, information and emotional support. Your social support network may include the following: spouse or partner, family, friends, co-workers, business contacts, professional counsellors, institutions, and organizations.

Our daily demands in life are difficult enough to deal with, let alone adding a change to the mix. We realize that altering your lifestyle, in any way, can be jarring.

Are you feeling overwhelmed trying to adjust to change? Do you have a feeling of uncertainty in this new situation? Sometimes, the people closest to you can give you all the support that you need. Other times, they cannot. You are free to ask your EAP counsellor to help you cope with and adjust to change, and help you to redefine goals so that you may see a more certain future.

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

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