

### Tips for handling on-the-job change while on assignment

Even if you work in a successful branch office of a large multinational corporation, given the global economic situation, there is bound to be change in the workplace. As a manager, you have likely learned – or will need to learn – how to deal with reorganizations, mergers, downsizing and cutbacks, which can be particularly difficult when working in another country. The following strategies can help you to handle on-the-job change while working abroad:

**Understand what is happening.** Change in the workplace may lead some people to experience a “grieving process.” You, and those around you, may need to deal with a range of emotions, including denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance before you can truly move forward in a positive way. While you cannot control what has happened to cause these emotions, you can manage how you adapt to change.

**Stay positive.** Avoid negative self-talk and negative messaging both for yourself and those who you manage. These can be counterproductive to your career, your health and negatively impact the work environment for others. Counter these thoughts by citing examples of positive actions and accomplishments. Identify and focus on areas of strength, and find ways to improve areas that need improvement. You may consider it helpful to find someone you trust and can speak freely with to share some of your concerns.

**Develop appropriate coping strategies.** Different coping strategies can help with overcoming stress caused by change in the workplace. These include task-oriented strategies (i.e. planned problem-solving), learning and adjustment strategies (i.e. modifying unrealistic expectations, learning more about the culture), interpersonal strategies (i.e. building relationships, seeking help with tasks) and avoidance and defense strategies (i.e. withdrawing from ethnocentric behaviour).

**Support your team.** Try to avoid making other large changes in addition to the changes already being experienced. See if you can find ways to make employees’ work easier and more enjoyable again – often they cannot change what needs to be completed and it may be difficult or dirty work that just needs to get done. Look for quick wins by removing roadblocks and challenges where possible. Create an environment that supports success, and increases the quality of the work experience.

**Always be prepared.** From the day you begin planning for and starting your expatriate assignment, start developing an internal and external career strategy. Establish and maintain contact with coworkers and management in your home country. Develop networking relationships with people outside of the organization. Upgrade your training and education whenever possible.

**Focus on the facts.** Gossip is a part of every work environment and can be even more rampant in the expat community so you will want to try to get facts before forming an opinion. Company correspondence should provide accurate information of what change can be expected. If you do hear some alarming news that affects you, discuss your concerns with management or HR in a professional manner.

**Keep moving forward.** While change occurs regularly, it is important to continue with your usual activities at work and home. Maintaining balance is critical. Do not let fear of change paralyze you or prevent you from making daily decisions. Maximize your free time and continue working on your plan to advance your career.

**Develop a support network.** Build a network of personal relationships outside the office. They can provide encouragement and companionship in good times and more importantly, difficult times. It is important to have local friends with whom you can share a few laughs and ease the stress of change, particularly when you are far from home.

Change is inevitable and will happen while you are on assignment. It is important to stay positive, healthy, flexible and true to yourself during the experience. Remember that you have accomplished a lot in your career, and this experience will help you as you move forward to achieving even more in the future.

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