

# Sustaining Change

Most of us are familiar with the following expressions:

*"The only constant is change"*

*"Change is never easy"*

*"There is nothing wrong with change, if it is in the right direction"*

*"Change before you have to"*

However, no words can alter the fact that change and disruption are difficult for both individuals and teams. When faced with an unexpected or unwelcome transition, it is human nature to descend into fear and doubt.

During unstable times, the core issue for many people is personal survival. In many organizations, managing change becomes difficult because putting bread on the table, family health, mortgage payments, and coping with an uncertain future consumes our thoughts and priorities. So, well-intended, straight-forward changes are viewed through a lens of suspicion. Though all skills sets are important when creating and implementing change, in unstable times, it is your people skills that will prove to be most valuable.

As we continue to manage the change and disruption in our lives, CSPN has put together some key perspectives to remember that can help you, your team, and your company get through it all.

**1. Remember: We are Always Changing. Change is Inevitable.**

Often when a change is unprecedented, much like our current pandemic, it becomes even more challenging to manage because of unspoken expectations. If your staff members have fallen into the trap of assuming they work in a stable and comfortable environment, where they always work with the same coworkers, reporting to the same manager, they may feel blindsided and betrayed when you alter the reporting structure or role focus. To help them and you remember that change is inevitable, switch things up once in a while to keep everyone on their toes - in a good way. It can be as simple as changing the update order during virtual meetings. Little actions like this can go a long way to developing and sustaining a culture where people are comfortable with change.

**2. Remember: Focus on What's in it For Them (WIIFT) Instead of What's in it For Me (WIIFM)**

Accept the fact that any time there's a major development at work - positive or not - there will be a natural dip in productivity as individuals and teams react and adapt to a new paradigm, environment, organizational structure, or leadership team. Your first message should not be, "here's what's happening, and here's what you should think about it." This approach will only create additional resistance.

Instead, look at the change through the eyes of each department or person, and give them time to work through their own individual reactions. Try, "Here's what's happening, and we know you're going to have questions. Let's talk about them."

### **3. Remember: Just the Facts Please.**

If you're making an announcement and you know your team will view it negatively, the worst thing you can do is try to convince them that it's actually a great thing for them. "I know you're all getting a pay cut, but can I get a round of applause for paying less in taxes?"

Stick to the facts. Be sure to include whatever relevant circumstances (not excuses) may have led to this point and sincerely acknowledge the negativity that comes with it. Ensure you are available to answer questions. As appropriate, you can also outline your plan for forward growth, the measures you've put in place to avoid this happening again, and other details that will give your employees more hope for the future. Try not to start any of your sentences with "At least..."

### **4. Remember Stephen Covey's Habit #5: Seek First to Understand**

When it comes to change management, there's no one-size-fits-all solution, and there is no predictable timeline for when everyone will be enthusiastically on board. Each person will proceed at their own pace through the change curve which starts with feelings of loss, doubt, discomfort, followed by discovery, understanding, and finally integration.

Rely on what you know about each individual member of your team, and after a while, reach out personally to those who seem to be stuck in doubt or discomfort. Seek first to understand, then to be understood as you try to help them make forward progress through the change cycle.

### **5. Remember to MLK: Communicate Clearly and Consistently**

MLK was a great communicator because he knew his audience and his message was consistent. When it comes to managing change, clear and focused communication is the most powerful tool in your toolbox. It is critical that you are able to communicate change to two distinct audiences. The first consists of your employees and team members. These individuals need to understand the need for change, as well as how it will impact their job responsibilities. Despite realizing that change is necessary, employees are often afraid of big changes in the organization.

The second audience includes key stakeholders within the company such as other members of management, the C-suite, and board members. If you are the person proposing a change, it's these individuals who need to be convinced it's necessary. If they have initiated the change but charged you with overseeing the process, it's these individuals whom you must regularly update on the status of the project.

### **6. Remember: Patience is a Virtue**

By the time you're announcing a drastic new initiative to the company at large, you've probably already been thinking about it, working through the details, and processing all of the ramifications for a considerable amount of time. Realize that your employees are going to have all the same questions you've been working through for months, that they are going to have fears and uncertainties to overcome, and they are going to experience a temporary drop in productivity.

As a leader, your best approach is to create a culture that embraces change. Respect everyone's right to have their own reactions. Communicate the news with authenticity and empathy, and give everyone time to work through the change curve at an individual pace.

\*Adapted From Tips for Effectively Managing Change, Inc.com

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*As an experienced organizational development speaker, consultant, master facilitator, coach, and author - his focuses on delivering meaningful and measurable strategies for organizations to create insightful leaders and harness team potential. With over 20 years in the organizational development industry, Corey is well known for his ability to connect with any audience at any size. He has provided strategic learning, organizational consulting, professional speaking, coaching and training to organizations - of all sizes - across North America. Some of his clients include: Shell, Aviva, BMO, VIA, Tim Hortons, Miele, and government agencies at all levels. He has a results-based partnership approach to develop customized solutions that meet an organization's unique business needs and resolve their most significant issues, helping them to create a lasting competitive advantage.*