



Facing Change at Work



A change imposed is a change opposed! As most of us know in the workplace setting, resistance to any number of sudden changes are the natural tendency we all experience.

Like the certainty of death and taxes, changes at work and in life, roll on like a river at flood stage without respect to the career, organization or office.

Whether it's the acquisition of an entirely new computer program (the most feared of all), or a newly hired supervisor with a completely different management style, merging offices, being promoted or demoted, changing locations or downsizing, the impact of change good or bad is felt by all at least for one year.

Yet there is some strategic and wise moves leadership and staff can make to help reduce the debris and fallout of unexpected changes. As a matter of fact I would say that the amount of preparation for whatever the changes might be in the near future will absolutely decrease the stress level of the organization, much like a town or village that is adequately prepared for an earthquake or tsunami.

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Three keys to survive, adapt to and implement change can be really helpful as well as strengthening for the team:

1 The Purpose of the Change (Why) *Why was the change even necessary?*

If a staff or team is not convinced that the new changes are even necessary, then there most certainly will be more push back and resistance among the ranks.

Example: I once worked with an independent health care clinic that had to merge with a larger national health care company. The changes were quite unwelcomed by most because of the number of different protocols, expectations, job descriptions and style of management.

While in a facilitated discussion with a frustrated staff pushing back on every new and different change, the supervisor specifically spelled out the purpose for the change. She clearly stated that their independent clinic could no longer fiscally stand against the health care cost of the current market.

She then said, that although they may have stayed afloat for a while, eventually they would of become non-existent and without jobs. I sensed almost an instant sense of relief, understanding and acceptance that wasn't there up to the point of the supervisor's explanation.

When pending changes are not articulated properly, the staff can become insecure and splintered into cliques that start talking among themselves about why the change even had to happen. Thus they begin losing confidence and trust in administration before they even get off the launch pad.

I tell management that they will be far better off if they give as much clarity and information to their staff ahead of the change. I go on to say that as leaders if they don't tell their staff their story behind the need for change then their staff will come up with their own story and interpretation regarding changes, and leadership will probably not like the story they are going to tell!

In addition you must know that one of the first insecure questions a staff member thinks or asks when huge changes are announced is: will my job be secure?

So in order to do damage control it is imperative to clearly spell out the reason, cause, purpose and benefits for the change.



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2 The Plan of the Change (What) *What will the company and my position look like now?*

The first feeling that staff have is one of fear since they have been forced out of their comfort zone to face the corporate unknown. Most employees rehearse the possibility of their jobs being threatened. For some who depend on routine, have set plans and do best with the predictable, their footing and emotions become more erratic and unsure.

Common Questions Employees Think or Ask

- ▶ Who will do what now? (WWDWN)
- ▶ Will my job profile remain the same?
- ▶ Will my desk or cubicle be in the same location?
- ▶ Will supervision change and if they do will their personality clash or work with mine?
- ▶ What are my new expectations?
- ▶ Will our location remain in the same place?
- ▶ Am I one of the reasons for the change?
- ▶ Will I have to learn more new responsibilities now and be pushed out of my comfort zone and skill set?
- ▶ Will I even be necessary within the company any longer?
- ▶ What if I can't adapt to the new policies or different expectations?

So a wise and empathetic leadership will recognize the struggle and uncertainty of the staff and will lay out a GPS for the pending changes so people know what the layout of the land will look like, what's around the next corner, where the destination is and exactly what the expectations are of them.

Weather there are frequent meetings or huddles to insure how staff is adapting to the changes or even a **transition change committee** appointed to do traffic control and keep the flow of the goals and staff going in the right



direction, staff will be greatly relieved to know that the one's flying the plane know exactly where they are going even if the flight is occasionally bumpy.

I recently work with another clinic and they are preparing to relocate to a new building. Although there is a high sense of anticipation the unknown of the specifics are a bit daunting. Where will my desk be, am I going to work next to the co-workers I've worked with for seven years? Is the new supervisor that comes along with the new building going to be micromanaging or secure and trusting. Will the cabinets and storage space be adequate? Will we have as much access to our immediate supervisor since the floor plan is much larger?

About 10 years ago the clinic where my wife has been employed for years relocated into a new building. I was intrigued at the sensitivity and creativity of administration as they asked the nurses in her department for ideas and input regarding seating arrangement, storage and cabinet space among other ideas.

Once the staff understand the purpose for change and what exactly will the change look like on an everyday basis then it's important to talk about who will actually help facilitate the change and participate in making the transition a smooth one.

3 The Process of Change (Who) *Who will be involved in making the changes happen?*

Who are the people that will see this change through in an efficient, skillful, and motivating way? It is imperative that there is a team who are positive voices in the company through the change process if morale is to stay intact. But if there is more of a deal with it attitude from leadership, there may become a growing problem of employee retention.

During the process of normal change in the workplace, there also seems to be three groups or attitudes that frequently start to take shape:

The Apathetic: They can feel that the change wasn't necessary anyway or it wasn't thought through clearly enough. So they have more of an indifferent posture that suggests that I'm just going to sit back and wait and see how this will turn out. The only problem with that is that when facing change we need pro-active and creative workers that are jumping in and becoming a solution rather than the problem.

The Dissenters: Unfortunately these folk can be a bit vocal and never move past the resistance stage of dealing with change. Their secret agenda or wish is that the whole project will actually fail. Within 6 months if they can't make the leap to supportive then they need to be warned and challenged regarding their divisive spirit, which in my estimation is clearly a performance based issue.

You know what they say about bad apples? It's never as true then when facing the stressful ride of forced changes.

The Supporters: These workers are like a fresh breeze that blows out the stale air of cynicism for those who refuse to go with the flow.

They will be the team that makes the change happen. If you are in leadership you want to seek them out as soon as possible. This shouldn't be that difficult because they carry an air of confidence and a positive attitude most days anyway.

When I train on "Adapting to Change in the Workplace" I encourage leadership to put a Transition Team together to see the change process through.

One person may oversee any training that is necessary as change is embraced. Another might be responsible to direct people into specific transitional roles to help the changes stay on track. Another may be the one to keep a pulse on how the staff is doing and give a listening ear as they process the changes. While another on the transition team may organize incremental celebrations as the company reaches new goals.

Employees buy into change much quicker if they can speak to the new challenges awaiting the organization. Rather than just allowing change to happen to them a true professional will want to roll up their sleeves, share input and ideas in order to help facilitate the changes.

So I highly recommend the three steps for preparation as you face the challenges that await your organization. Forced change won't be as opposed if you:

1. Clearly Share the Purpose for the Change.
2. Explain in Detail What the Change will Look Like.
3. Find the Right People to Help Facilitate the Change.



Bill Gallagher has been counseling and working with professionals since 1980. His emphasis in the workplace is to help develop both relational skills and professional standards among administration and staff. He has worked in multiple organizational settings and of recent has spent most of his time addressing workplace issues in healthcare and city government.

Bill formed TeamWorks in 2001 to help organizations achieve their goals for establishing high morale and client satisfaction. TeamWorks currently specializes in offering one-on-one surveys and evaluations for management and staff to assess the current culture's needs and recommended trainings going forward.

In addition to conducting a variety of workshops and in-services on workplace issues, Bill mediates conflict among partnerships and staff relationships, speaks at conventions, facilitates management retreats, and offers personal consultation and counseling for staff.

Bill's strengths are in public speaking, mediation, and understanding the complexities of relational dynamics in the workplace. He lives in Medford, Oregon, with his wife Jenny, and enjoys spending time with their five children and five granddaughters.