

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Any change, whether it's positive or negative, can be stressful. A positive change, such as the birth of a child, can leave us feeling excited, yet scared and overwhelmed. A negative change like a divorce or job loss can make us feel depressed, anxious and confused. Why is change, even change that is beneficial, so stressful? It's because it involves the unknown, and the unknown can be frightening¹.

It seems as if our lives are constantly changing. If it's not changes at work – a new boss, new duties, new processes, or new co-workers and clients – it's changes in our personal life – a new home, new relationship, new child or new community. Change, especially when we initiate it, can be exhilarating or, when it's imposed on us, frightening and threatening. Either way, change causes a great deal of stress because it involves loss – loss of the familiar, loss of our sense of security, loss of control and sometimes loss of optimism. While these losses can be extremely unsettling, they eventually result in new beginnings.

Adapting to change

We can't escape change – it's part of life. So we need to find ways to adapt. Here are some tips to help you deal with change.

- **Keep an open mind².** Just because you haven't done something before doesn't mean you won't like it. And it never hurts to learn new skills and have new experiences. Take steps to avoid becoming rigid and afraid of new experiences. Keep making friends, exploring a variety of interests and activities, and accepting new challenges at work.



Adapting to Change

- **Accept change³.** Most organizational change is beyond your control; decisions are made and there's no turning back. So rather than pining for what used to be, look to the future, invest your energy in finding a way to embrace the change rather than resisting it.
- **Be flexible⁴.** The change may be difficult at first, but try to find creative solutions to problems. Look at the change from different angles to see where things might work to your advantage and what new skills you may need to acquire.
- **Stay positive⁵.** You can't control the situation but you can control your response to it. Having a positive attitude will help you – and others – get through challenging times. Besides, these changes could end up being extremely advantageous for both your professional and personal life.
- **Manage your stress⁶.** Find ways that work for you. Running or walking, yoga, meditation, massage, or just taking a few minutes to read a book or listen to music. Find time for yourself and do something you enjoy, especially in times of change.
- **Gather information⁷.** To ease your anxieties, learn as much as you can about what you're facing. Talk with friends and co-workers who've faced the same kind of changes and ask how they coped.
- **Continue doing what you do best⁸.** Workplace changes can consume everyone's time and attention and that can cause productivity and efficiency to slip. Keep performing your job to the best of your ability and try to remain focussed on your own performance.



- **Take care of yourself⁹.** You're better able to deal with stressful situations when you're eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep and limiting your alcohol consumption.
- **Hold on to your sense of humour¹⁰.** When you're feeling stressed, rent a DVD of your favourite comedy or go out to lunch with a friend who makes you laugh.
- **Find safe and healthy ways to express your feelings¹¹.** Express your feelings with friends or family. You may also want to try talking to your manager or supervisor if you feel comfortable doing so. Seek professional help if you are having difficulty coping with change. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) can provide resources and support.

Finally, remember that nothing stays the same.

Circumstances could change again soon, making you wish you hadn't wasted energy getting upset about the original change. If you're able to maintain a positive attitude, you'll keep your options open. You might even find unanticipated benefits!

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