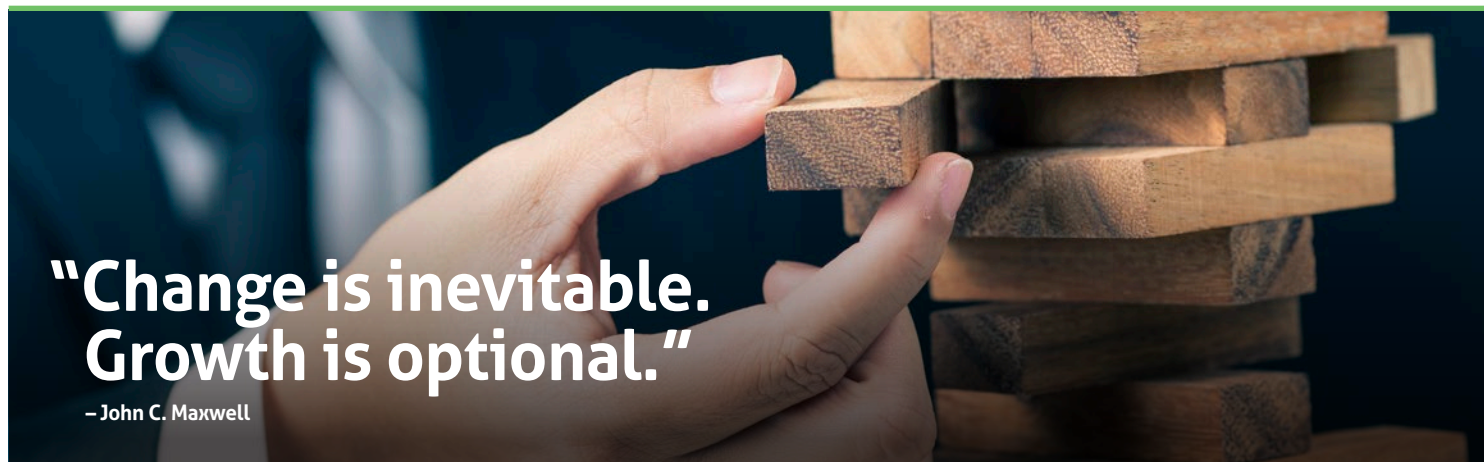




# Vitality

An EFAP Newsletter for Human Resource and Occupational Health Professionals, Program Administrators, Supervisors, and Key Personnel



**“Change is inevitable.  
Growth is optional.”**

– John C. Maxwell

## Guiding Employees Through Change

As organizations evolve to keep up with a marketplace – indeed, with the world – advancing at lightning speed, they are constantly seeking new, better and more efficient methods, processes and procedures for the workplace. It's resulted in something that affects nearly every employee in every industry: the inevitability of change.

While change can signal exciting new developments, opportunities and learning benefitting the organization and its staff, it can also evoke deep feelings of insecurity, confusion, grief and fear. Recognizing and acknowledging these natural responses within your team as you introduce change is important.

Research shows that two-thirds of all organizational changes fail, costing valuable money, resources and time<sup>1</sup>. A major factor in these failures is the inability of the organization's workforce to cope with and effectively adjust to change. This is not surprising. In a 2017 report by Sanofi, 31% of employees agreed that workplace stress has been an overwhelming experience in the last year<sup>2</sup>.

Adding major changes into an environment many already view as emotionally taxing is something that must be approached compassionately, empathetically and pragmatically for best outcomes. Consciously supporting and guiding teams through change makes all the difference in whether new processes, technology, roles and corporate culture result in emotional discord and lost productivity... or a marked, positive experience of personal and professional growth.

In all cases where change is imminent within the organization, there are steps that could be taken to lay a solid foundation on which to build:



**Nurture Trust With Open, Honest Communication.** As the wheels of change pick up speed, it's easy to unintentionally become less accessible to employees. Keeping the channels of communication open, even expanding them, can have a significant, positive impact on fostering trust, goodwill and a willingness to embrace change. Make efforts to be more available, visible and an attentive and careful listener. Circulate regular written communications and hold individual and team meetings to encourage questions, input, and discussions about how your employees are feeling - and dealing with - what's happening. This allows you to convey accurate information during a time where confusion and misinformation may arise and gives your employees the opportunity to be heard, have their concerns addressed and to see firsthand that they aren't alone. This also serves to help you gauge how everyone is adjusting and what specific areas could be better addressed to increase morale and productivity.

**Acknowledge That Change Can Be Difficult...But Stay Positive.**

People spend huge portions of their lives working, so it's normal for them to react strongly and negatively to changes that may include a loss of co-workers, stability or control. The five-stage Kübler-Ross model of the grieving process (where one moves through denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) is sometimes applied to those dealing with organizational change, further validating how profound these feelings can be. Let your employees know you understand their feelings and that they're normal, while maintaining an upbeat, positive attitude. Be sure to convey that you believe in the change that's happening, and support it – and them – wholeheartedly. Keep spirits and enthusiasm up by congratulating and thanking your employees on jobs that are done well and encouraging them to transfer their unique skills into whatever new circumstances or roles may come.

**Include Employees In The Process.** Purposefully having your workers engage in tasks directly related to the change at hand fosters motivation in working toward its success, while empowering the team. Making employees active, vested agents of change creates a sense of pride, control and ownership, which can fall by the wayside during major organizational transitions.

**Give Change Ample Time.** Introduce change gradually in well thought out phases you share with your team ahead of time, where possible. Predictable, smaller transitions made over manageable periods of adjustment are more likely to be accepted and effectively implemented than drastic, sweeping ones without a shared plan of action or vision.

Along with these universal steps, the following may also be helpful in supporting your employees through specific types of change:

**When dealing with re-organization, downsizing and role changes...**

- Clarify the purpose and objectives of the team and put the change into context so your workers fully understand the "why" of what's to come.
- Make support services and resources (training programs or career coaching) with relevant reading material available, especially when your team will be dealing with role changes or possible downsizing.
- Assure employees that any changes will be carried out professionally and with compassion.
- Point out the opportunities for personal and professional growth inherent in most role changes.
- Nurture team bonding and cohesion to keep your staff feeling connected to and supported by one another. Use social activities, celebrations of achievements or group training to get the ball rolling.

**When dealing with new ownership, culture or policies ...**

- Show your support by enthusiastically implementing new policies and corporate culture guidelines.
- Clearly lay out what the changes are in writing, as well as in group meetings where employees can ask questions freely.
- Ensure expectations are clear, concise and presented in an inclusive, respectful and sensitive way, if possible, in written format to avoid any ambiguity or confusion.
- Be sure your team knows whom to approach with questions or concerns about any changes.
- If possible, include your team in the construction of new policies or conscious changes to your corporate culture. Hold brainstorming sessions to foster team building and focus on the ideas most likely to benefit your employees and the company.



**When dealing with new technology...**

- Drum up enthusiasm by identifying the inefficiencies associated with the old technology and the heightened productivity that will occur with the new.
- Time the introduction of new technology to coincide with education, training and resources designed to empower your team to use it confidently.
- Capitalize on your team’s strengths by having those who are quick to learn mentor those having a harder time. Employees are more likely to be open to learning something new from someone they know, like and trust, and those teaching will feel more connected to the transition while gaining valuable experience.
- Ask for feedback. Often those using new technology on a daily basis are the first to catch bugs or other small glitches that can hamper productivity. Requesting feedback makes for better, more frequent communication, and unlocks unknown potential or opportunity with the new technology. Employees who have direct input are likely to champion change and foster support for a more efficient workplace.

More than ever, change has become an expected, natural part of any job. Yet, if it isn’t managed carefully using thoughtful practices, what’s meant to bolster efficiency, profit and the health of your organization can quickly lead to a decline in productivity and profound damage to the morale of your employees.

When it’s done right, your team can explore new areas of interest, find new opportunities for growth and collaboration, work smarter not harder, and flourish in ways that might never have been possible before change was brought into the picture.

Sources:

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2. Sanofi. (2017, January). Winds of Change New directions in employee health benefits. Retrieved July 17, 2017.
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