



The Blake Group Newsletter

November-December 2009

Dealing With Change

Change is an inevitable part of organizational and personal life. This has always been true. All of us have witnessed change in our private and professional lives. The world we live in is constantly changing and the rate of change is accelerating. Consequently, organizations and individuals must continually adapt to this changing environment by changing themselves or they will not survive.

Although change is constant, it nevertheless presents problems to most of us. In general, we don't like it. We are often afraid of it just as we are of the unknown. As creatures of habit, we are usually more secure and comfortable with the familiar, what we know. Change may affect our job security, our earnings, our status, and our personal relationships and our well established habits and routines.

However, once we consider change in depth we can view it with more understanding, and make it work for us in a positive manner.

Causes of Change

Change by its very nature is hard to predict. Sometimes change is thrust upon us, unforeseen and unwanted. At other times, we anticipate it and prepare. Every situation is unique. The following are some of the principle causes of change in our workplace:

- **Mission:** The overriding goal that drives the function of each organizational unit.
- **Workload:** Today's economic environment forces us to learn to manage increases or decreases with equal dexterity, often with the same amount of resources.
- **Political:** Different administrations inevitably establish different priorities.
- **Management:** As leadership and guidance changes from the top down, individual focus and differing approaches toward fulfilling the mission impact the workplace and work force.
- **Resources:** Budgetary fluctuations which can be triggered overnight by world events. Staffing is a significant component of resources. As we have seen, downsizing and redistributing of the people in the workplace continues. This will present a different set of problems which must be coped with and resolved.
- **Technology:** The accelerated pace of the rate of change in technology is staggering. What appears current and "state of the art" today becomes obsolete tomorrow.

Positive & Negative Aspects of Change

With any change or growth opportunity, there are positive and negative aspects. Consider the following as you reflect on changes, you may be experiencing or that you have experienced.

Positive

- Can be a growth opportunity for people
- Can provide challenges
- Can allow an organization to remain competitive
- Can help solve problems
- Can be a means of reaching higher goals

Negative

- Can represent a loss of security
- Can cause dysfunctional behavior
- Can be viewed as loss of status
- Can create stress and anxiety
- Can create low morale

What is Your Personal Approach to Change?

Review these four questions and think about your preferred answer:

My personal approach to change is to:

- a. Hide my head in the sand.
- b. Jump for joy.
- c. Dig in my heels.
- d. Grin and bear it.

The word group I most frequently associate with change is...

- a. Ambiguity, uncertainty, disruption.
- b. Challenge, excitement, opportunity.
- c. Adjustment, difference, transition.
- d. Deterioration, stress, fear.

I have experienced (or am experiencing) the following change(s):

- a. Downsizing
- b. Outsourcing
- c. Department restructuring
- d. Other

The best way to introduce change is to...

- a. Wait until the last minute.
- b. Do so gradually.
- c. Let people find out for themselves.
- d. Force people into submission

Response to Phases of Change

DENIAL: When things change, especially unexpectedly, our first and very normal reaction is to deny it; denial is a coping mechanism. We approach change with the attitude that if we ignore it and wait long enough it will go away and things will get back to normal.

BARGAINING: Even when we perceive that the situation won't go away, we still firmly believe that things worked before the change. So we try to bargain for reinstating the old system. We campaign for a return to the "good old days."

ANGER: No matter what we do, reality steps in and we realize that change is here to stay. Faced with the inescapable fact, and we can do nothing about it, we get angry. Anger comes in many forms and can be directed at those responsible for the change – at those closest to us, and even at ourselves. There is no logic to our anger. We're just angry – angry at the world for making us do something we don't want to do.

Exercise:

Write down an example of unexpected change you may have experienced in the past. Describe the situation and the emotions you experienced. Try to identify the denial, bargaining, and anger states you went through.

Did they overlap at some point?

What to Do

ACCEPT: the cold hard truth is that change is a constant, an ongoing process and is here to stay. Since it is an ongoing process, we have to look at the past. Think of a time when you were successful in dealing with change.

- What happened?
- How did you grow and meet the demands of your changing environment?
- If you did it before, can't you do it again?
- It all starts with the first step – acceptance.

COMMUNICATE: Don't be afraid to share your feelings. Talk to your friends and associates. Chances are they have been through similar situations and felt the same way. Take time to gather information. Talking things through helps allay your fears and in the process, you will amass an inventory of information and skills.

PLAN: Managing change successfully starts with new goals and a well-designed plan. You know where you are and where you want to be; now decide how you are going to get there. Clarify goals and expectation. Get feedback from others. Start with small, deliberate steps and reward yourself often. Keep focused on the desired income.

Question

How would you handle the same situation you previously described today? Consider your answers to the four multiple choice questions. If you would handle it the same way analyze why.

The key to our success is dealing with these changes is in willingness to accept the idea that when we experience change, it's normal to want to change what is going on. It is important to understand that these feelings are part of us and must be dealt with if we are to grow personally.

Thank you for reading. Have a safe and cheerful holiday season. See you in 2010!

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