



Vitality

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



Coping with Workplace Change

Constant change is the norm for many organizations. Global economic events, advances in technology, and organizational growth or decline drive workplace change on a daily basis. While you might not have control over the changes that your employees are faced with, you do have an important role to play in building a workforce that not only survives, but thrives, in an environment of perpetual change.

Any change to an organization or to an employee's role can result in job insecurity, stress, and anxiety. For employees already struggling with mental health issues, the effects are even greater. An effective workplace change strategy can be the difference between a resistant, burned-out team and an adaptable, productive team.

In this issue of Vitality, learn why change management is a vital part of any workplace wellness strategy and how you can help your employees to view change as an opportunity, rather than a threat.

The Impact of Change in the Workplace

Global stress levels are on the rise. Studies show that work is the biggest source of stress for North Americans, and workplace change is a leading contributor to employee stress. A stressed workforce means reduced productivity through absenteeism, presenteeism (attending work while unwell), errors, poor customer service, low morale, and increased short-term disability claims. It is estimated that mental health problems cost employers \$20 billion annually¹.



During periods of change – particularly during downsizing events – employees are often left feeling disempowered and afraid. Believing that the company's bottom line trumps any effort they may put forward, employees can quickly become disengaged. This presents a secondary tidal wave of lost productivity and increased health care costs. The potential for mismanaged change to spiral into a sea of unforeseen costs and workforce challenges is very real.

Implementing healthy change initiatives to support employees is a worthwhile investment.

Building a Resilient Workforce

In today's business environment, organizations must be equipped to face challenges with confidence, perform well under pressure, and recover from disappointments and defeats. A resilient organization relies on a resilient workforce.

Resilience is developed over time as we acquire knowledge, experience, and perspective. Fostering resilience should be an ongoing objective for managers at all levels.

Here are a few tips to help maintain a flexible and robust team:

- **Build trust with your employees.** Employees who feel that you value, respect, and trust in their abilities are more likely to feel the same way about you and about the organization. Listen to your team, remove barriers to help them achieve success, and practice self-awareness.
- **Keep the workload manageable.** Everyone is trying to do more with less these days, but unmanageable workloads result in burned-out and stressed-out employees which will undermine your efforts to build a healthy and enthusiastic team.
- **Help employees understand their purpose.** Role clarity is the foundation upon which resilience is built. Show your team how their daily efforts are contributing to the objectives of the company so they can see value and meaning in their work.

- **Provide direction, but don't dictate details.** Micromanaging is bad for business, period. Employees who have autonomy are more confident and resourceful. Help your team understand the department's and organization's vision, and then support them in hitting targets and meeting deadlines.
- **Nurture a cohesive team.** Effective teams have a shared sense of purpose and connectedness, and positive interactions serve to promote resilience among members. As a manager, you set the tone for the team dynamic and oversee the microculture of trust and respect among your staff.

Change = Opportunity

Change can bring chaos, but more often, it brings great opportunity. Employees who fear and resist change can't seem to look past the chaos and recognize the future potential for growth and progress. An effective change management strategy will enable employees to respond to change with determination, rather than fear. A clear strategy will help staff to understand the need for change, to cope with uncertainty, and to look to the future.

Here are a few tips to foster a positive relationship with change among your staff:

- **Shine a spotlight on opportunity.** Remind staff of the potential that exists as a result of the current changes. Communicate regularly as new opportunities are uncovered.
- **Speak positively.** Be mindful of how you present change to your staff and speak about change in a positive manner. Be proactive where possible, and do what you can to ease the transition and temper negativity or chaos with positive, factual information.
- **Call it out – constructively.** Engage in honest and constructive dialogue with employees who are being resistant or negatively impacting the team. Successful professionals must be willing to embrace change, even when the outcome is unknown. Growth almost always comes with discomfort and periods of uncertainty. Remind staff that you value their professionalism and adaptability.

Addressing Job Insecurity

You can't always avoid or prevent re-organizing or staff reductions. During times of economic uncertainty, it is helpful to have measures in place to address increased stress in the workplace. When uncertainty is looming and employee stress is high, your best tool is communication.

Give as much advance notice to affected staff as possible, and communicate as openly as possible. Maintain regular contact with unions and employee representatives, and be sure that employees are aware of available support and resources related to job loss and employment insecurity (available as part of the Homewood Health EFAP). Where possible, increase investments in workplace health programs to ensure that your teams have the support they need.

It is important that employees feel like they can provide feedback and discuss their concerns openly with managers and human resources staff.

“Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, it became a butterfly.”
~English Proverb

Lead the Way for Employees

You can't build a resilient, flexible team if you don't possess these traits yourself. Rise to the occasion and model the response to change that you wish to see in your employees each day. Your ability to be positive, optimistic, and calm during stressful situations will help create a strong foundation upon which to build personal and organizational success.

1- www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2011002/article/11562-eng.htm

 Send us your questions, comments, and suggestions — vitality@homewoodhealth.com

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