



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Rolling with Change...

By Jaime Carter-Seibert, MA

“[One] cannot discover new oceans unless [one] has the courage to lose sight of the shore.”—Andre Gide

January is often a month of self-imposed change. We resolve to quit smoking, get into smaller-sized pants, or finish the projects we’ve carried into the new year. But year-round, life is also full of changes that we don’t see coming and can’t control. Health crises, sudden financial hardship, and natural disasters can leave lasting scars in the long-term, and anxiety in the short term. Knowing these critical changes can be life-altering, we expect recovery to be difficult and tend to give ourselves a break while we adjust. But what can surprisingly knock us off kilter are less dramatic changes, because we don’t expect them to be difficult: your department has a new manager; the dentist you’ve seen for years is retiring; the last of your single friends gets married; or familiar buildings in your city are replaced by a landscape of new construction.

Part of what is difficult about change is holding the perception that things “should” remain the same. This view can threaten our sense of security in unfamiliar situations and show us that we are not always in control. Change can force us to re-examine our expectations and modify our habits and attitudes, which requires work. And counter-intuitively, it is actually by *leaning into change*, like a skier leaning into a turn, that we can keep on balance and move through it. This doesn’t mean we will always accept the outcome of a change, and may decide to move, quit, or end a relationship. Rather, in facing the change, leaning into it, we can begin to adapt to it.

This is easy to say, but harder to do and it takes time. Reacting to change follows a path much like the stages of grief. Knowing it will be a process may reassure you that over time you will adjust, and that your reactions will likely change along the way.

There are many views on change, but *changing oneself* seems to be a universal strategy for surviving shifting circumstances. With that in mind, here are some tools that can help:

- **Determine whether the change is truly important to you and if you can alter it**—Once you answer these crucial questions, you can begin to respond in a way that is most effective.
- **Look at the big picture**—Ask yourself: will this still impact me in 5 minutes, 5 days, 5 months, or 5 years? Perspective can help you relax a little as you realize the change probably won’t impact you indefinitely.
- **Resist Negative Thinking**—Worst-case scenario thinking can make worry sky-rocket. Catching yourself and redirecting it will help you keep an open mind, see possibilities, and lower stress. As is often the case, whether you expect the best or the worst, you will likely find it.
- **Avoid Avoidance**—Don’t let change happen to you while you’re looking the other way. Engage and be a part of the process in creating something new.
- **Keep Moving Forward**—Maintaining regular routines can provide some stability, self-care, and distraction from non-stop thinking about the changes. Also, things still need to get done...

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- **Have realistic expectations**—Don't expect that there won't be "growing pains", or that you or someone else will perform "perfectly" in a new situation until you figure it out. Be patient with yourself and others while you're processing the change.
- **Be optimistic**—Challenge yourself to envision something good that could come of a change.
- **Be flexible**—Think of how your skills could be leveraged in a new way, and how this can help you adapt to your new situation.
- **Use Humor**—Remember those things that bring you joy and seek them out. Many medical studies point to humor as having a significant impact on health and wellbeing. Use humor to ease your mind and take a break from the seriousness that change can impose. You can still attend to serious matters, but a humor break will help boost your capacity to cope.
- **Ask for help**—Talk with colleagues, friends, family, or your EAP for support and guidance in how to adjust to the change. Another perspective can often shift us in a positive direction we hadn't considered.

Change is inevitable, but you can cope, adjust, and even thrive through reflection, patience, courage, support, and time. Remember, you can count on your EAP 24/7 to help you navigate change and other events in your life. Call us anytime at (800) 777-4114.

References:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/here-there-and-everywhere/201210/20-quotes-change>

