

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

# Change Is Inevitable, Growth Is Optional

Change has always been a part of life, but today it seems that change is happening faster than ever before. This is especially evident in the workplace. Day-to-day work life is commonly filled with policy and procedure changes, shifting responsibilities and expanding workloads. At the same time, our personal lives are often marked by competing demands and priorities.

Being able to adapt and respond effectively in a constantly changing world has become a necessary skill. How you respond to change will vary. When you initiate the change, you are likely to define the experience as exciting. On the other hand, when change is imposed on you, you may feel threatened and fearful about the change, and focus heavily on negative outcomes.

**Moving from Resistance to Acceptance**

When you resist change, you knowingly or unknowingly behave in ways that attempt to keep things "the way they were." Your attitudes and actions are not aligned with the new directions and you are likely to feel discomfort or tension as a result. To help yourself move from resistance to acceptance, it can be useful to understand that there are varied reasons why people may resist or struggle with change:

**It may be because … you are a creature of habit.** Consistency provides people with predictability, stability and comfort in their lives. Once you have done things the same way for a certain length of time, you become quite good at what you do. When you are asked to make changes that impact how you do your job, your sense of comfort and competence becomes disrupted. You may at times feel insecure about your abilities.

It's important to recognize that it is natural to feel out of sorts and frustrated when you're embarking in new directions. Ask yourself what knowledge or skills you may be lacking and seek these out. You may also benefit from making a goal that relates to doing your personal best within a changing environment.

**It may be because … the change involves a loss.** Certain life events, such as losing a loved one, involve an obvious major loss and grief. However, with other sorts of change the losses we experience are not always so obvious. With workplace change, workloads are usually so full that it is hard to imagine you've lost anything.

However, as a result of the changes, you may not have the same opportunity to connect with certain people or certain activities that you've enjoyed. These subtle changes can translate into a loss, and leave you feeling amiss and reluctant to move forward with the changes.

Identifying those aspects of the change that represent personal benefits will help you to maintain a balanced perspective and orient you positively toward the change.

**It may be because. you fear the unknown.** During periods of change, when times are uncertain and unpredictable, you may fear or worry about the unknown. You may be anxious about where you are headed and what the future will look like.

In the workplace, a change in one area may require decisions in another that can't always be foreseen or articulated as quickly as you would like.

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There are a number of things that you can do to help yourself adapt to uncertainty or ambiguity:

- Determine how the change will affect your immediate situation; ask questions to clarify issues that seem unclear, and stay focused on the task at hand. To minimize worry about what lies ahead, ask yourself, “Is there anything I can do about this matter?”

- If yes, then identify the action to be taken. If not, acknowledge that you have no control over the matter, and focus on those things that you can influence.

- You can learn from your past experience of change by asking, “Have I been through anything like this before?” or, “How did I get through it and what seemed to work?”

**Positive Orientation Towards Change**

No matter what change you are faced with in life, it will be much easier to cope with and adapt to if you hold a positive attitude about change in general. Having a positive orientation towards change involves:

- Knowing what you can and cannot control in a given situation
- Recognizing that disruptions are a natural response to change
- Being creative and looking for opportunities that change creates
- Recognizing that there are a number of right ways to do things
- Utilizing your personal resources and strengths to actively do the best you can

**Being Aware and Taking Care**

Having a positive outlook on change will go a long way in minimizing stress. It’s important to be aware of your stress levels and to take special care of yourself during these times.

Everyone has an active role to play in how they respond and adapt to change. Understanding this will make it much easier to take advantage of the opportunities for learning and personal growth that do exist in times of change.