

Change and Transition

2400 years ago the Greek philosopher Heraclitus commented on the subject of change, saying, "Everything flows and nothing stays." This is often translated as "There is nothing permanent except change."

This aphorism reminds us that change is our constant companion. We change, circumstances change, the world around us changes. Intellectually we know this is true, yet many times we find ourselves resisting, fearing, or regretting a change. Our challenge is to find ways to accept and embrace change, so that we move with it, not against it.

In organizational life, some changes are planned, while others are unanticipated or even unwelcome. Changes beget transitions. A change is an event, something tangible. It might be a move, a new employee, a business contraction or expansion. In contrast, a transition is a process, intangible yet still very real. It is the human experience, the psychological process that people go through as they acclimate to a change. It is the essential period of adjustment, a gradual process, and it takes time.

Providing leadership through a change and transition process is critical. Employees want, need and appreciate good leadership. When a significant organizational change takes place, leaders need to guide the change and transition process. Just as employees may need to adapt and learn new ways of doing things, leaders must also demonstrate that they are learning new skills and stretching beyond their comfort zones. Personal example is essential for credible and compelling leadership.

Here are some suggestions for dealing effectively with change, whatever your level of leadership and responsibility. Successfully navigating a significant

change requires everyone's participation.

1. Accept change and ambiguity. They are part of life and part of business. Resisting change only makes it more difficult and unpleasant.
2. Understand the distinction between influence and control. We can influence much more than we can control.
3. Create simplicity within complexity. Wherever possible, simplify systems, procedures, and processes. This is not the same as taking unwarranted shortcuts, but critically and creatively finding the simplest way to accomplish something effectively.
4. Be a valuable contributor. Don't just "watch from the sidelines." Offer ideas and suggestions and then follow through with action. Practice kindness, forgiveness, and patience with your co-workers. Be a team player.
5. Take educated, calculated, and strategic risks. Nothing bold or important is done without some degree of risk-taking.
6. Remain flexible. Keep an open mind. Don't be attached to a specific outcome. Strive for excellence, not perfection.
7. Adapt quickly. Be responsive and resilient.
8. Have a learning mindset. Explore, discover, and learn new ways of seeing the issues and challenges. Be willing to go back to the drawing board.
9. Take responsibility for yourself: your health, your career, and your

future. Honor your needs, values, and goals.

10. Be prepared to let go of the status quo. The way things used to be done is not necessarily the best way for the present or the future. Ask: how could this be better, what needs to happen, what's the next step?

For leaders, planning the change and continuing to plan throughout the transition process is one of the keys to a favorable outcome. Frequent, candid, and thoughtful communication with everyone impacted by the change is essential during this delicate time.

The Chinese symbol for "crisis" (often translated as "change") has two elements. The character on the left half stands for danger. The character on the right stands for opportunity. This is a beautiful illustration of the duality inherent in any change. Along with the risk that may be associated with the change, there is great opportunity as well. The more aware and mindful leaders are about the change and transition process, the more the risks can be minimized and the opportunities expanded.

In closing, we return to Heraclitus, who also said, "You can't step twice into the same river." This reminds us that the river of life is ever changing. The more we can be resilient and accept change, the more peace of mind we will have navigating the river and its currents.

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