

## **Job Aid: Managing Reactions to Change:**

### **Change Leaders Embrace Paradoxes**

- They are involved in both driving and enabling change
- They recognize that resistance to change is both a problem and an opportunity
- Good change leadership focuses on outcomes but is careful about process
- Change leaders recognize the tension between getting on with it and changing directions
- Change leaders understand the need to balance patience and impatience
- Change leaders understand that it is a process, an ongoing flow of shifting emphasis from one to the other and back again

### **Managing through Change Process Delays:**

There may be long periods of time when you don't have much to say. If you wait, everyone may be gone (mentally or physically), or may start to come to their own conclusions before you have something to say. People may be anticipating massive change and a tremendous increase in workload. Stress and anxiety may build.

So, communicate!

- When you can't tell people what, tell them how the what is going to be determined
- When you run into a delay, explain
- Tell them what you are doing about the problems causing the delay
- Tell them what you wish you could tell them
- Tell them you know this is a difficult time for them
- Tell them you that you hope they are willing to hang in there

Don't...

- Tell them to "trust us"
- Tell them to "be loyal"
- Tell them "stop complaining"

When in doubt, just keep communicating.

## **The Emotional Response to and Leader Support for a Positively Perceived Change**

Even changes viewed as positive involve an emotional roller coaster ride. Here are the common stages we tend to move through when the news appears good. Individuals will vary in their pace in moving through these stages and some individuals may not move through them completely.

**1. *Uninformed Optimism:***

The individual has positive feelings about the change and high self confidence

Provide leadership by: reinforcing enthusiasm while preparing them for unforeseen difficulties

**2. *Informed Pessimism:***

The individual has negative feelings or doubt about the change and diminishing self confidence

Provide leadership by: Pointing out that difficult times are part of learning and providing support

**3. *Hopeful Realism:***

The individual is beginning to see the change as achievable, decreasing pessimism and increasing self confidence

Provide leadership by: Acknowledging what has already been accomplished and build confidence to tackle remaining challenges.

**4. *Informed Optimism:***

The individual is confident and optimistic

Provide leadership by: Reinforcing the importance of persistence and follow through

**5. *Completion:***

The individual strongly supports the change, is satisfied and is willing to help others through the transition. Self confidence is high.

Provide leadership by: rewarding the achievement. Help to identify important learnings and prepare for the next challenge.

## **Responses to Any Change:**

As a result of change, people go through transition. First, they must go through the end, loss or letting go of the old before they can begin the new. The following represents some of the more challenging emotions, the demonstrated behaviours for each emotion and the coaching or leadership actions that are necessary to support individuals as they experience endings. The best thing a leader can do is allow the individual the time necessary, while providing the appropriate leadership at each stage.

### **1. *Shock, Anxiety, Lock up:***

- Change is seen as a threat
- Seems too much to handle
- Chaos, everything is up in the air
- Sense of anxiety and helplessness
- Resentment
- Rumour mongering
- Decreased productivity and effectiveness

Provide leadership by:

- Encourage talking and listen carefully
- Don't talk them out of feelings but offer a different view if you have one
- Give positive feedback on their progress, if feedback is genuine
- Offer accurate information to dispel rumours

### **2. *Denial or retreat:***

- Seeks protection from anxiety and chaos of the initial shock
- Disengages from reality by denying the existence of change
- Retreats to familiar routines/evasion
- Rejects information related to change
- Flip attitude
- Skepticism
- Individual publicly or privately checks out from the change

Provide leadership by:

- Explaining the change and the reasons
- Giving examples of peers who are changing or learning
- Giving examples of the need for this new process/approach/technology
- Publicly developing a problem solving climate
- Privately developing a safe climate to express negative feelings and/or generate an expectation that the issues will be resolved

### **3. *Anger:***

- May show rage, resentment, envy, grumbling, irritation, passive aggressiveness, vandalism, indignation, foot dragging

- May appear to be either overly rational or irrational
- May lash out in all directions, often in those who have shown the most support
- May make more mistakes

Provide leadership by:

- Allowing that the anger is legitimate
- Don't fight it or personalize it/assume blame for it
- Listen and acknowledge it.
- Don't talk them out of it
- Don't collude or agree with them
- Recommend EAP if extreme

#### **4. *Bargaining:***

- Tries to minimize the impact
- Offers to make deals to lessen the impact
- Frantic search for some alternative to change
- A last attempt to retreat
- Attempts to get out of situation

Provide leadership by:

- Keep realistic plan in sight
- Don't be swayed by promises or negotiations
- Reinforce situation as it is
- Don't get into bargaining or problem solving with them
- Gently remind them of reality

#### **5. *Depression:***

- Feelings of victimization
- Immobility and resignation
- Lack of physical and emotional energy
- Focus on past and anticipated future losses
- Silence
- Down or disheartened appearance
- Tearfulness

Provide leadership by:

- Acknowledging, sympathizing and reaching out
- Initiating conversation and asking questions to draw them out
- Encouraging talking and sharing feelings either one on one or in a small supportive group
- Promote supportive group events, interaction and impromptu fun
- Recommend EAP, if appropriate

## 6. *Testing*:

- Acknowledges the opportunities and limitations present in the new reality
- Explores ways to redefine own role and goals
- Tests out new assumptions and methods for operating

Provide leadership by:

- Acknowledging progress
- Helping them to plan for the future

*(Based on the work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, William Bridges, F. Cawsey, G. Deszca, C Ingols)*

### **Principles to Keep in Mind:**

- No matter how exciting or positive the change is, we still feel a sense of loss.
- It's transition, not change, which people ordinarily resist.
- Habit is habit and not to be flung out of the window by anyone, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time. *Mark Twain*
- It is difficult to manage the transition of people (i.e. Enable and sustain them), if the change process is poorly planned.
- Before people can begin the new, they have to end the old and move through uncertainty; a period in which they are not in the old nor yet in the new.
- The best way out is through.