

# Things do not change. **We do**

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**We live in a world of constant change, and even though the vast majority of these changes are for the better, change is still something that many people – and therefore many organisations – can find extremely difficult to deal with. Why is this, and what can be done to help people embrace change rather than fearing it?**

## The nature of change

Change is all around us. Changes can be small or large, but the overall impression they create is of a world that is in a constant state of flux. Change may be welcome, but for many of us, the reaction to certain changes will be one of automatic resistance, which in turn often results in stress.

To accept change is akin to getting used to a new pair of shoes. The new shoes may be more waterproof, more hardwearing and better looking than our old ones, but they will almost certainly not be more comfortable until they are worn in. The amazing thing is that (assuming they are the right size and they fit properly) we

often cannot envisage how or why we were so reluctant to put them on in the first place.

By definition, going forward involves some change, in order to keep on course. An organisation is either continually improving or it is failing, because no successful organisation can afford to simply 'stand still'. This is why it's so important that employees are given all the tools they need to help them embrace change and new ways of working – ie to feel comfortable in their 'new shoes'.

**Why is change so difficult to handle?** People are programmed into a pattern of behaviour with which they

feel safe (their 'comfort zone'). Change can threaten this feeling of safety, and people can feel disempowered by change – particularly if it is imposed on them or challenges their accepted thinking. It is therefore vital for people to understand clearly why imposed changes are necessary, and how those changes will impact them, their position, their responsibilities, and possibly their remuneration and future prospects.

One reason that staff may resist change is if they don't think they will be comfortable in the new job environment or able to meet the new standards etc. If a change, particularly a fundamental change, is imposed within a company, a proportion of the staff affected will be bound to be dissatisfied. It is important to listen to their concerns and not to dismiss them out of hand – some of their worries may be valid and it is important for management to acknowledge this.

## How to make change work

If your organisation is contemplating a major change, you can help to facilitate this by taking account of the following:

Think through the change and what is required of the personnel affected, in detail, so that a clear plan of implementation is available. Be aware that some retraining may be necessary and have a plan of action ready to implement this.

Staff will respond best if they feel involved in the decision making. Maybe they cannot be involved in all the major decisions, but their implementation will involve a number of smaller steps and they can almost certainly be involved somewhere (and add value by bringing in their experience).

Everyone copes better with change if they feel at least in partial control of it. It is the feeling of being out of control that can be frightening to most of us. So involve your staff, as far as possible, in their own areas of the change. Perhaps set up an implementation team involving a member of staff from within each

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department and reporting up to - and down from management.

Keep everyone informed as far as is possible of timetables and details. The imagination and concerns of staff can run riot when they are kept in the dark, particularly if they are anxious about the change. Regular meetings are essential and even if time is short, don't abandon them. Make sure that the planned changes are clearly understood at all levels.

Don't give in to the temptation to impose changes without consultation. Unless you can persuade your staff to buy into the change by means of the steps above, they may leave or become de-motivated, neither of which will benefit the company. Similarly, a culture of fear (where staff are actively discouraged to convey concerns or show vulnerability) is counterproductive.

Everyone works better where they can see the benefit for themselves. So take time to think through not just the overall plan of the change, but how it will affect and benefit individuals, then 'sell' these benefits to those affected. Don't oversell them though, as staff will subsequently disbelieve anything you say. It is far better to be honest and admit that some things still need to

be worked through, as this will help to build up trust with your employees.

People need to feel they have some input to enable them to overcome their fears and anxieties. If you encourage them through this stage, they can become great advocates for the change and will work with you instead of automatically resisting.

implemented, don't allow any return to the old ways or allow this as an option.

#### **Preparing your organisation for change**

Because change is so much a part of everyday life, your employees will benefit greatly from initiatives that make them more resilient. At its most simple, this means helping your

**Inflexibility means that you become an obstacle and instead of asking for your co-operation, colleagues will simply ignore you or go around you**

Accept that everyone's capacity for change is different and some will respond quicker or more easily than others.

Try to break the change down into manageable parts so that the overall change does not seem too overwhelming. Consider running a pilot operation to smooth out the glitches and allow input from users.

Once the change has been

employees maintain a healthy mind, healthy body and the positive mental attitude needed to approach change as a challenge and opportunity for improvement.

We all know that eating healthily, exercising and not being overweight are important, and we also know exactly how to achieve this (whether we do it or not!). To have a positive mental attitude may prove more

difficult, and many of us are totally unaware of how to build our inner strength, with the consequence that when there is a problem, obstacle or required change, our internal capacity is not always sufficient and sometimes our mental manoeuvrability is too slow.

So how do you build inner resistance and strength? How can you prepare yourself for the challenges and adversities you will come across in the months and years ahead? One thing is certain, and that is that if you are not sufficiently resilient, your inflexibility will mean that eventually you will become an obstacle and instead of asking for your co-operation, colleagues will simply ignore you or go around you.

We all know that the only way a skyscraper or any very tall structure can remain upright is for it to possess an inherent ability to move - albeit ever so slightly - with the prevailing wind and rain.

We have to do the same, by



host, author and professional speaker from the US, who lives and breathes his ethos that 'It's not what happens to you, it's what you do about it'. Here is a man who has overcome two life-threatening traumatic accidents that left him severely burned,

cannot help but listen to his every word.

W Mitchell has overcome so many adversities in his life, and has come out the other side with strength and determination. 'Before I was paralysed there were 10,000 things I could do. Now there are 9,000. I can either dwell on the 1,000 I've lost or focus on the 9,000 I have left,' he says.

There is no doubt that the traumas W Mitchell has gone through have changed him as a person. His life script was not one that he planned and yet he takes on each challenge with an acceptance and gritty determination. His life experience makes him into the person he has become, his message is forceful and memorable, and he is a success story that we could all do well to try to emulate.

How we could all benefit from such inner strength and such a positive outlook!

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learning to work with the forces we meet, moving and giving a little when the conditions demand it.

**'It's not what happens to you, it's what you do about it'**

The greatest challenge of all, in terms of change, is how to deal with adversity. I met W Mitchell, the TV

without hands and paralysed. He has had to survive numerous operations and extensive plastic surgery, but talks to audiences from his wheelchair as if he were a tank commander addressing his troops. He has a quiet confidence and a measured delivery that possess an almost magnetic quality ... you



Carole Spiers combines three roles of broadcaster, journalist and corporate manager in the challenging field of stress management and employee wellbeing. For more information on CSG's services including in-house and public training, stress policy, stress audit, risk assessment, attendance management, rehabilitation support, post trauma support, mediation, impartial investigations, expert witness, nationwide employee counselling, team coaching and mentoring services, please contact us at the Carole Spiers Group, International Stress Management and Employee Wellbeing Consultancy, Gordon House, 83 - 85 Gordon Avenue, Stanmore, Middlesex HA7 3QR. Telephone: + 44 (0) 20 8954 1593. Fax: + 44 (0) 20 8907 9290. Email: [info@carolespiersgroup.com](mailto:info@carolespiersgroup.com) Web: [www.carolespiersgroup.com](http://www.carolespiersgroup.com).

