

# Embracing Change

Supporting NHS Staff in the West Midlands through Transition

## 1. Supporting Yourself

Understanding and Choosing Your Response to Change

Developed by:



Using information and materials provided by:



## UNDERSTANDING AND CHOOSING YOUR RESPONSE TO CHANGE – MAINTAINING PERSONAL RESILIENCE

*(Source: Transitions - An evolving guide to working through organisational change. ©NHS Yorkshire and Humber)*

Our response to change is influenced by:

- i. Who initiated the change (i.e. how much choice we perceive that we have)
- ii. Our current relationship with our three basic needs:
  - Relationship and social contact (how well supported do I feel; how much social contact am I having – enough, too little, too much)
  - Variety and stimulation (how much novelty and interest is there in my life)
  - Stability and structure (how many things are changing in my life right now; how much uncertainty am I dealing with)NB. these needs vary from person to person and over time
- iii. The degree of attachment we have to the specific current situation

Many changes that impact directly on us are initiated by others. Nevertheless we usually have a lot more choices in any given situation than we might at first perceive:

- Whether to stay in the situation
- The meaning we give to the situation (what we tell ourselves about why this change is happening to us)
- The permission we give ourselves to explore and express our concerns constructively
- The way we respond – what we allow ourselves to say and do and the new opportunities we allow ourselves to consider

Many changes impact on our three basic needs:

- Relationships may be disrupted – people I enjoy working with leave or are moved to different work
- The degree of variety in our current role or situation may be increased or decreased, and the change process itself may increase stimulation levels providing more interest and energy or to a degree where they become stressful
- The process of change is usually experienced as de-stabilising and the new situation may change current structures (my regular rituals and routines)

Disruption to any or all of these can lead to high stress levels. However, by anticipating the possible impact of a change, and maintaining a high level of self-awareness, we can take appropriate corrective action to take care of ourselves during the process.

If we are attached to the current situation, we can anticipate a sense of loss. Find a way of celebrating and appreciating what is ending and then allow yourself to start thinking about what you might want to do next.

It is easy to see why we can become distressed or unbalanced by a major organisational change.

Here are some techniques we can use to navigate successfully through.

### 1. Reality check

This tool replaces panic with planning.

Ask yourself:

- What is the worst thing that could happen?
- How likely is that to happen? (Use a 1-10 scale where 1 = highly unlikely, and 10 = 100% certain)
- What, if anything, could you do to minimise the chance of it happening?
- If it did happen, what choices would you then have?
- Are there any actions you can take now to address the concern you have?

### 2. Identify opportunities

What new opportunities does this change offer?

### 3. Build up our Resilience

*(Thanks to Caterina Rando for this suggestion taken from her book "Power Thinking", London 2001)*

There are likely to be disappointments and setbacks as you progress through the change process.

#### **Let go of what you can't control**

Complaining about things that you have no control over is a waste of energy. Focus on what opportunities are offered in each new situation.

- Build on previous bounce backs**  
How have you dealt with previous setbacks and disappointments in your life? How have you turned them to your advantage? What do you know works for you?
- Make a Choice**  
We can choose our response – to be a victim of circumstances or to be proactive in looking for new opportunities; to focus on what you are losing, or to look at what you might gain.
- Watch your speed**  
Many people respond to their fears by throwing themselves into more activity – and in an organisational change process it is certainly easy to keep ourselves so busy that we don't have a moment to think about our personal future. This can be useful as a short-term strategy but depletes your physical and emotional resources and does not enable you to identify and make the most of new opportunities. If you know

## Supporting Yourself: Understanding and choosing your response to change

this is a tendency for you, find a way to create thinking spaces – work with a colleague, coach or mentor if needed.

- iv. Let it out  
When you are deeply disappointed, angry or frightened, it can be useful to find a way to express your strong feelings safely. Vigorous exercise can be useful – running, sprinting, or a few rounds with a boxing bag. If you are very verbal, write down your feelings – don't worry about producing anything eloquent – just scribble pages unedited – you can always destroy them at the end!
- v. Rev up your Rejuvenation  
Create space for nourishing support e.g. book a massage; treat yourself to a long hot scented bath; or a Turkish bath; go for a walk in the country; meet up with friends who make you laugh; go to a concert.

### 1. Attend to the Basics

Whilst a certain degree of pressure can be stimulating, prolonged stress can cause us harm. We can limit the damage by attending to the basics:

- Boundary your working time – it is easy during a period of organisational change to begin to work longer and longer hours. There is often additional work and we can feel pressured to demonstrate that we are working hard in the mistaken and often unspoken belief that this increases our chances of getting another job. It is important for you to have space away from work where you can get a helpful perspective on the changes and start to really explore the new possibilities that might be emerging for you.
- Watch your diet – chocolate can be comforting and alcohol help you unwind but monitor whether your consumption is increasing. A good balanced diet is more helpful in keeping your brain working effectively and you need to be able to access all your creative resources if you are to make the most of this transition for you. Plan in more nurturing treats for yourself – a long scented bath, a massage, a day out with friends, a trip to the theatre
- Exercise – similarly make time for exercise, preferably in the natural world as both these can positively impact your stress levels.
- Support your sleep – anxiety can impact on our sleep patterns but do give yourself the best chance at sufficient regular sleep by getting into a routine and doing something relaxing before you go to bed. Watch your use of stimulants such as caffeine as under pressure, these can simply exacerbate your anxiety
- Celebrate – consciously review your achievements each day and think about the good things that happened during the day, not just the frustrations and worries
- Manage your negative self talk – whilst there are many things we don't control, to some extent we create our own reality at any given moment by the messages we give ourselves. Whilst genuinely expressing our feelings can be a healthy release of tension, dwelling on your anxiety and all the things that might happen is rarely helpful to you. (You will know the difference by how you feel afterwards. If you feel lighter and relieved afterwards, it was the former; if you feel worse, it was the latter)

- Choose your company – again, whilst it can be reassuring at times to know that you are not alone with your concerns, it is easy to get dragged down by constant fear fuelled conversations. In Transactional Analysis, this is often called the “Ain’t it awful” game because it is a conversation that has got stuck in a rut and is no longer meaningful or helpful. Some people are more likely to be impacted by these conversations than others so choose your company wisely. If you find some people deplete your energy, find people who are more upbeat. Social time with people from outside your organisation can be really helpful.
- Stay in touch with your centre – each of us has a different way of achieving peace with ourselves. For some people they are at their most at home in themselves when they are gardening, or out running, or enjoying an evening with friends; for some it is achieved through meditation or walking by the sea or through spiritual practice. You will know when you are most comfortable with yourself, in that state when you are not thinking about anything, just being. Whatever your way of finding your way to your centre, make sure you create space for this.

#### **Resources**

- Spencer Johnson “Who Moved My Cheese?” Vermilion, London, 2000
- Joan Borysenko “Inner Peace for Busy People” Hay House, California, 2001
- Tanya Arroba & Kim James “Pressure at Work: A Survival Guide”, McGraw Hill, London 1987
- Richard Carlson “Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff at Work” HodderMobiis, London, 1999
- FSA Redundancy Handbook - <http://www.moneymadeclear.org.uk/redundancy>