



Leading through change

Change is an inevitable part of life and a common experience in most businesses in the modern world we live in. Everyone experiences it at some point, to some degree and everyone will manage it in a different way. Sometimes change is expected, but other times it is not. And one of the biggest challenges that comes with any type of change is uncertainty.

INTOLERANCE TO UNCERTAINTY

As human beings, we crave certainty and desire the known. Change can be fear-inducing and anxiety-provoking as it can cause a threat-response in our brain. When many are faced with uncertainty, they will instinctively try and fight it or avoid it.

There are various different ways that team members can react to change. For instance, some may embrace it and use it as an opportunity to grow and develop. Others may be indifferent and go along for the ride with no major concerns. However, there is often a proportion of individuals who will find it difficult to process the unpredictable nature of change, which can have a detrimental effect on their wellbeing. For instance, due to this conflict, intolerance to uncertainty can lead to fear, anxiety, stress and tension.



HOW TO SUPPORT TEAM MEMBERS THROUGH CHANGE

Bearing in mind that there exist different reactions to change, it is important to consider how to identify warning signs that a team member is not coping well. One role of leadership is to recognise and reduce the uncertainty that emerges during a time of change.

Things to look out for include changes in behaviour, thoughts and/or mood. For instance, if you notice significant social withdrawal, absenteeism, presenteeism, lack of interest, low mood, irritability, or negative thought patterns, there may be something going on. It is helpful to look out for these and to be mindful that different individuals may present in different ways.

To alleviate some of the distress and uncertainty associated with change, there are various things that leaders can do. This can include organising team meetings, regularly checking in, being transparent about stages of change, providing frequent and open communication, and empowering employees to offer their suggestions, opinions or concerns. In essence, you want to try and reduce the uncertainty as much as possible by being clear about expectations and indicating that team members are supported during this time.



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HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF DURING TIMES OF CHANGE

It is also important to look after yourself during times of change not only for your team members, but also for yourself. Some tips to take on board are summarised below:

- **DEBRIEF AND STAY CONNECTED:** Take the time to talk with a friend, colleague or family member. Debriefing releases the stress hormone oxytocin, which can relieve symptoms of stress and make us feel better.
- **KEEP YOUR CERTAINTY IN CHECK WHEN FACED WITH UNCERTAINTY.** When uncertainty arises, it is easy to feel like everything is uncertain. However, this is very rarely the case. It is important to redirect your attention to those things that you are certain about.
- **EMBRACE WHAT ISN'T WITHIN YOUR CONTROL.** It is rare to be in control of absolutely everything. Lack of control is rather unsettling, worrisome or scary for a lot of people. However, it is beneficial to embrace these uncertainties. Try and let go of this desire to control everything. Let things flow. Let things happen. What you do have control over is the process you go through to reach decisions. Own that. And embrace the rest, no matter how much – or little – control you have.
- **AVOID 'WHAT IF'S'.** These will only leave you feeling stressed and worried. Avoiding them allows you to move forward and to put a good contingency plan in place.
- **REMEMBER TO BREATHE.** Sometimes we get so caught up in our busy, chaotic lives that we forget to breathe. Focus on your breath, slow yourself down, be mindful of the moment. By doing this in the face of uncertainty, you can approach it in a thought-out, calming way.
- **UTILISE MY COACH FOR PEOPLE LEADERS.** In order to best look out for your team, it can be helpful to seek support from My Coach. This can equip leaders with strategies to effectively manage and support teams, but it can also help to reduce the possible impact that a time of change can have on their own wellbeing as well.

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Corporate Mental Health Alliance AUSTRALIA

The Corporate Mental Health Alliance (CMHAA) is a group of Australian businesses dedicated to providing mentally healthy workplaces for their people.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT:

Website: cmhaa.org.au

LinkedIn: [Corporate Mental Health Alliance Australia](https://www.linkedin.com/company/corporate-mental-health-alliance-australia)



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