

Balanced Living

March 2022



Change evokes fear in most people because of the uncertainty it presents. People wonder: Will I be adequate for this new position? Will I be able to get along with my new boss? Will the corporation my company is merging with allow me to keep my job?

“Major changes, such as new management, downsizing or a company buyout, can result in a feeling of panic,” says Susan Starr, a human resource consultant and owner of H2O Marks, a Dallas-based marketing company.

Understanding change

When you have a routine, you know what to expect, and even if it's difficult or boring, it's consistent and reliable. You have learned how to do your work and deal with the people who work with you. But when something changes, suddenly your routine is broken and you no longer know what to expect.

Even if the change is for the better, the transformation can be difficult. For example, when one company installed a new phone system, a frustrated employee exclaimed, “I know it will be so much better once I get used to it, but right now the phones are driving me crazy.”

“It is the same with any kind of change,” says Ms. Starr. “There is a period of adjustment until you feel the consistency that builds trust and confidence. During this time, you may feel disoriented, frustrated, angry and powerless.”

The best time to prepare for any change is when things are running smoothly. That way, you'll have time to plan ahead.

One way to do so is to practice the following four A's of coping with change:

Awareness

Since uncertainty about the future creates the most fear and stress during a change, try to find as much information as you can about your situation. Whom can you ask? What can you learn? What research can you do? The more you learn, the less uncertainty you'll experience. Behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed will help you cope with change.

Acceptance

You may not like the change, but if you accept the fact that it is the way it is, instead of fighting it or complaining about it, you'll feel less frustrated. “It's important to accept transformations with grace and a sense of looking forward to a new experience,” says Ms. Starr.

Attitude

Are you being fearful or are you thinking about the possibilities for improvement change might bring? To focus on the positive aspects of your change, write a list of all the possible positive outcomes. Even though minor changes can cause stress and frustration, the good news is that any change can be an opportunity for something positive to happen. What's more, when you learn how to cope effectively with minor changes at work, you'll develop the skills and positive outlook necessary to help you deal with a major change.



Action

This is where you do have some control over the situation. It's how you prepare and respond to change.

The following positive actions can help you cope.

- Develop a network. Always keep in contact with your managers and fellow employees from former jobs. Your network will be a valuable resource in times of change.
- Learn new skills. Learn a new computer program. Take a class in communication skills. Learn to make presentations. Ongoing training will add skills to your professional tool kit.
- Change your surroundings. Do what you can to make your work area pleasant and comfortable.
- Ask action questions. Whom can you talk to if a situation is getting more difficult to cope with? How can you get to know a new boss or coworker? What ideas can you present to your company that will help with the change?

"The key to coping with change is resilience," says Ms. Starr. "Resilience means knowing how to survive and making the best of change in spite of setbacks, barriers or limited resources."

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Working in a high-stress environment can take a toll on your mental and physical health. It can also take the joy out of life -- if you let it.

Fortunately, you can take steps to help relax and keep job stress from getting the best of you.

Moreover, "practicing relaxation techniques can improve your ability to think clearly," says Warren Huberman, Ph.D., senior psychologist at the Joan and Joel Smilow Cardiac Rehabilitation and Prevention Center at New York University Medical Center. "When you're relaxed, the quality of your work will improve."

Using the following techniques throughout your workday will help you manage your stress, feel better and get more done.

Breathe deeply

Taking a few deep breaths is one of the most powerful techniques available to quickly lower your blood pressure and slow your pulse.

"Pick a number, say 25, and count backward on each breath until you get to 1," suggests Dr. Huberman. Or teach yourself to relax on cue by picking a word such as "calm." Slow your breathing slightly while repeating the word.

"If you practice relaxation while repeating a word such as 'calm,' the word itself eventually becomes a cue to relax," he says.

Another technique: While concentrating on your breathing, close your eyes and picture yourself bathed in a blue light.

Go for a walk

To physically break the stress cycle, "walk around the block or to a different part of the building," says Dr. Huberman. "People often make jokes about feeling chained to their desks -- but very often, they're not."

Take time to reflect

Besides these short-term, stress-reducing techniques, investigating the causes of your stress also can help. It's vital to explore your life and its stress sources.

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Ask yourself: Am I doing what I like with my life? Are the decisions I've made genuine, or am I living somebody else's expectations? What steps could I take to improve my life?

You can have the time of your life in a stressful job that you really want to do. The work doesn't affect your health adversely because you've made the decision and have control. You start running into problems with stress-related issues when you relinquish control.

Take care of yourself

Paying extra attention to your health when you're under heavy stress is crucial. The following suggestions can keep you on the right track:

- Exercise regularly. Walking, cycling, dancing and doing other aerobic exercise can improve your mood.
- Eat a healthful diet. To boost your energy, eat a healthful diet rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low-fat foods.
- Don't abuse substances. Alcohol and illegal drugs are closely linked to depression. Their use can contribute to or worsen your condition.
- Get plenty of sleep.

The COVID-19 pandemic has unsettled the lives of students across the country in the last two years. During this time, the nation has seen savings accounts dwindle, unemployment rates rise, and jobs in various sectors disappear. The pandemic has not only changed how students live and learn every day, it has also changed how they find the means to pay for and sustain their education.

Finding financial balance in your life may feel challenging, especially if funds are limited and your earning potential may be lower than you'd prefer. Yet, achieving financial security isn't just about your earning potential. How you spend your money, manage your debts, and stretch every dollar you earn can make a big difference in your success.

Here are some tips for getting your finances under control and maximizing your budget for a lifetime of money-savvy living.

Create a budget. Make sure you include how much you have, how much you earn, what you owe, and what revolving bills need to be paid each month.

If you have a part-time or full-time job, try to narrow your budget down to a two-week period to better monitor how you need to manage what you earn and spend between paychecks.

Separate your needs from your wants. If you're spending too much money on the things you want rather than on the things you need, start to cut out unnecessary spending.

Look for deals. If you aren't already using discounts, sales, and other money-saving opportunities, you may be missing out on ways to put more money back into your budget.

Increase your earning potential. Do you have a talent that you can use to earn extra money? Do you have extra time in your day that could be spent working part-time in an online position or as a tutor? Even an hour or two of work each week can put some extra cash into your pocket.

Pay yourself first. If you have debts that need to be paid off, set a small amount of money aside for your savings first, and then focus on paying off as much as you can of your debt. This will help you have extra funds for a future emergency, while making sure you're paying off what you owe over time.

Practice stress-relieving techniques. Financial stress can seriously impact your emotional well-being. Make sure you're engaging in the activities that can help to keep you from feeling overwhelmed as you work to build a better budget that will support your personal and academic goals.

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Stopping Rumors in the Workplace

Rumors are stories that are doubtful or of uncertain truth. In the workplace, the first victims of rumors are trust and morale. Misinformation and gossip fuel rumors, and each time a tale is shared, it acquires additional layers of untruth. What a mess! Since rumors can be disruptive, it makes sense to understand how to quash them. Rule #1 is don't participate. Many rumors are associated with astonishing, amusing, interesting, or spicy information. You may feel an earnest need to repeat the information. This is a signal you're caught in the rumor mill. Rejecting participation will dampen the motivation of your coworkers to further repeat the rumor. Asking, "Is it true?" will often end the progression of a rumor by exposing its lack of confirmable information.

Make Your Clique a Positive Force

Employee cliques are natural associations of employees, but they sometimes get a bad rap. In the workplace, self-awareness is key to helping ensure any clique you find yourself part of remains a positive force. Cliques have power as a group. They can play a positive role in workplace productivity when they reinforce the contributions of members and use their creativity collaboratively. To enhance your work climate, avoid using your clique's influence to bully, ostracize, withhold information, reject inclusiveness, dominate, or share gossip that can hamper focus and productivity.

Back to Face-to-Face Communication

The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to resort to remote offices, masks, Zoom calls, and digital communication. As the clouds of the pandemic clear and business restrictions fade, you may need to give yourself a nudge or a reminder to consider the value of face-to-face communication again. The advantages of personal 3D communication are still with us. You can expect fewer misinterpretations, more effective gestures, faster reciprocation of a smile, more visible body language, more persuasion ability, and less misconstruing of capital letters and exclamation points as anger instead of the excitement you meant to communicate!

Stress Management Skill: Planning

A study of over 3,000 people in 29 countries a decade ago showed that about 25% of perceived happiness is accounted for by how well we manage stress. The skill delivering the most impact was *planning*! Planning is acting ahead and paying attention upstream to see what needs doing. The New England Centenarian Study of the Boston University School of Medicine finds stress management to be a leading skill among participants. So whether paying a parking ticket before it doubles or having that conversation with your boss sooner rather than later to iron out a growing communication issue, heading stress off at the pass by planning can literally be a health practice to add years to your life. Learn more at time.com (search "plan happiness").



Avoid the Term “High-Functioning Depression”

“High-functioning depression” is not a real clinical subtype of depression, but it may be tempting to use this term as a descriptor for a person we suddenly discover suffered with the disease and took his or her own life. Such was the case with beauty pageant queen and attorney Cheslie Kryst, whose suicide was widely reported in the national news recently. As with alcoholism, symptoms of depression can be very real but masked or unseen by others, except possibly by those who are close associates, friends, or loved ones. Every person’s presentation of symptoms is unique. Some loved ones may play a role in minimizing or protecting the victim, which allows us, the public, to believe all is well. The ill person may complement this enabling with denial, along with minimizing symptoms as the illness grows worse. Mustering this willpower can only last so long, however. The Kryst tragedy brought to national attention the importance of avoiding terms like “high functioning” in describing chronic diseases or, in this case, falsely portraying a different type of depression that is unlike the “normal” depression others experience. Just as “functional alcoholic” also enables continuation of the disease by reinforcing denial, the phrase high-functioning depression signals a special case exception that can fuel denial, resistance to self-diagnosis, and delayed treatment.

Find a Hidden Networking Group to Boost Your Career

There’s a group of like-minded colleagues with your job expertise meeting somewhere, but you may not know where they are or how to reach them. They’re not all on Facebook, LinkedIn, or MeetUp. The Northern Virginia, Hotel and Motel, Human Resource Managers Association” isn’t found in any directory, but did meet at one time as an education support group. The best part about networking is not the possible opportunities to leverage your connections as resources when you are changing jobs, but rather the ideas you discover to improve your current job satisfaction and value. To find an association that could be nearby, start by searching www.directoryofassociations.com and also try Googling “[your profession] + association + organization + academy.” Ask about informal groups meeting near you. They could be hidden gems that can be used for networking that will take you to the next level!

Early-Stage Alcoholism Virtually Unnoticeable

Early-stage alcoholism can be so deceptive that even the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) dedicates considerable space online to helping supervisors understand it. The goal is to help employees earlier rather than losing them because of performance or attendance issues. Ironically, early-stage alcoholism is not necessarily characterized by noticeable problems with alcohol, due to the tolerance and adaptation often seen in those who have this disease. Early-stage alcoholics may experience the same or even higher social and occupational functioning than their peers for a period of time. It’s later that the pattern reverses. Past drinking efficiency wanes, and problems grow worse. The good news with early-stage alcoholism is about its treatability. A shorter history of problems and less practice at denial and defending drinking can make accepting the diagnosis easier. Are you concerned about your drinking pattern? The company EAP or a knowledgeable counselor can help. Source: www.opm.gov [Search “alcoholism in the workplace”]

Early Birds Might Be More Productive

“I’m a morning person.” “Not me. I work better at night.” Which is better? The jury is back: Research seems to point to early birds being more productive. With over 100 peer-reviewed neuroscience articles, Robert Carter, Ph.D., author of “Morning Mind,” argues that flipping your routine to become a “morning person” will have a profound impact on your life. Research has shown that only an extremely small percentage of people are actually night owls who are more productive at night than during the day—about 1 percent. Among other reasons, research shows that your brain, which has received more body fluid being level all night, is actually prepped for more productivity upon waking! Source: www.themorningmind.com/about-book

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