

Managing Change in an Ever-Changing Environment

Change initiatives can come in the form of restructuring, reorganizing, layoffs, and the effects of a global pandemic. How should change be managed successfully at work? The answer is: strategically. HR and other leaders within an organization play a crucial role in a successful change transition and should follow these essential steps:

- **Look at the big picture.** Understanding the business and how any change affects the company's mission and goals will help those in leadership roles think more strategically versus administratively. What is the reason for the change and how will it impact the bottom line? What will be achieved short term by the change; but most importantly, how will it affect the organization in the long term?
- **Be proactive.** When employment laws change or new laws are introduced, make plans on how the company will comply. Staying on top of legislative issues allows for better preparation for those who need to get up-to-speed quickly on the rules and communicate rights and responsibilities to employees.
- **Understand and respond to the morale of team members.** Any change is difficult to adjust to and team members often do not understand the underlying reasons for change. Communicate early and often. Be honest without violating confidentiality or privacy policies. When change happens, the focus should be on building trust. Putting a communication plan in place, being consistent, and following through will go a long way to building trust among team members.
- **When communicating a change initiative, create a positive climate of understanding.** Explain the reasons for the change and how it benefits the company and the team members in the long run. Realize it will take time to let go of the old and accept the new changes, so reinforcement of the positives is key. The worst thing a leader can do is to undermine the change process by agreeing with the negatives brought up by team members and blaming the company for the change. It hurts the credibility of the process and the individual leader's reputation.
- **Any change process will require follow-through.** Meetings with team members should be conducted regularly and consistently after a change initiative to see how people are doing. Emotions do not end when a change process is over. If staff cuts have taken place, "survivors" want to be reassured they belong and may need to talk over feelings of guilt or uneasiness about the future. Use empathy and know when to refer team members to an employee assistance program.

Change will continue to be present in our workplaces as companies look to operate more efficiently and effectively post COVID-19. In addition, compliance with new employment laws, such as the Families First Act, will affect how absences are handled. Those who embrace this ever-changing environment with an understanding of the big picture, initiative, good communication, and follow-through will be more successful.