

Be a Change Champion

Whether sudden and unexpected, or long overdue and much needed, change within an organization is disruptive. And while not all disruption is bad, it affects employees and leaders at all levels and, if improperly managed, can result in detrimental consequences. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) says that *“employees who are dissatisfied with or upset by change are generally less productive.”* But with a little preparation and support, you can become a champion of change and prime your employees to handle agency adjustments with ease.

Prepare to persevere

You can't effectively guide your team through times of change if you haven't properly processed the information or accepted the news for yourself. After all, managers are employees too, and a transition can be just as – if not more – difficult for you as it is for your employees. Here are some things to consider when changes arise at your agency.

Ask questions

When you're notified of an upcoming change, find out as much as possible about the situation so you are better able to convey information to your team. Think about questions your staff might ask you – or what you would want to know if you were them – and pose those same questions to your leadership. You'll want to be able to explain what's happening and why, the benefits and challenges, and what it will mean for your staff and the agency as a whole.

Get on board

Before you can expect your employees to accept and work through a transition, you must embrace it first. It's important that you model the behavior you desire from your employees, so take time to think about your reactions to the change. Find a way to acknowledge the benefits in order to communicate the upside and maximize buy-in from those who look to you for direction.

Identify your allies

Transition takes time and the path forward may get bumpy, so be sure you know who you can rely on for support. Whether it's a point person in charge of change management, your supervisor, the human resources team, or your peers, it's important to have reinforcements when issues arise or if your employees have questions that you can't answer.

Manage change in the moment

It's not unusual to want certain processes to be cut and dried. You hear about a change being made, you make a plan and take action, and expect your staff to fall in line. But human behavior is not so straightforward and managing the change means dealing with your own anxiety so you can be present—in the moment—for the variety of reactions your staff may display.

Expect resistance

Many people fear or oppose change and may react to it in unexpected ways. For some, resistance is due to an inherent distrust of leadership. For others, resistance is fueled by feelings of uncertainty or the anxiety invoked by the notion of change. Attempt to ease these concerns by explaining the reasoning behind the change, clearly defining each person's role in or contribution to the transition, and by asking for and responding to feedback.

Update often and honestly

Regularly update your staff on the status or progress of the transition and be as transparent as possible. Be honest about what you do and don't know and be clear about what you are at liberty to share. Employees can become frustrated by a lack of information at times but receiving consistent communication about what you know (even when it seems insignificant) can build trust and make them feel more secure about the future.

Approach with empathy

While it's always a best practice for leaders to have empathy for their employees, it's especially vital during a change. Lacking compassion for those who can ultimately make or break a successful transition is a mistake, so take some time to consider how your employees might feel about the change. Listen to their wants and needs and be authentic in acknowledging their concerns while still moving forward. Also keep in mind that *how* you communicate with your employees throughout the transition may be more important to them than *what* you communicate.

Your EAP is available 24/7 to help you navigate the ups and downs of organizational change. Call any time day or night for guidance, information, and resources that you can use to ensure a successful transition for you and your employees. The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to federal employees at no cost.

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