



TOPIC: CHANGE MANAGEMENT

TITLE: PHASES

"The world hates change, yet it is the only thing that has brought progress." - Charles F. Kettering

We all know someone who is currently experiencing a change - whether in their personal or professional life. Some of the changes are minor, some major, some positive and some negative. Regardless of their type, they share one thing in common: they often cause uncertainty, discomfort, evoke fears and unanswered questions, and force us to do things differently.

My message today focuses on helping people cope with change. There are four main phases in which people respond to change: betrayal, denial, confusion and uncertainty, and eventually, search for solutions. Although some people may go through each phase in order, some visit a phase more than once, and some jump around. I want to preface, however, that usually people do go through each phase at some point, and their pace can be very different. Each phase has its own purpose, and although we can't control each person's time in each phase, we can control how we help them through our own communication style.

For each phase, people want and need different information. I'd like to discuss briefly what your employees, peers, friends, etc. might be experiencing and how you can best communicate with them as they experience the phases of change.

Phase I: Betrayal

This is where the feelings of shock, numbness and disbelief occur. People feel personally betrayed by the decision, decision makers or proposed change. Often from here, they move soon into denial.

Phase II: Denial

This is where most of us wait to see if it will "just go away". It's very simple: don't talk about it, push it out of your mind, ignore reality and delay taking action. Sound familiar? It should - it's very common.

How can you best communicate?

In both phases, people want just the facts! This is about sharing current information (even if the answer is I don't have any), communicating frequently, and focusing the facts surrounding the change. More importantly, there is no room for hype here. The more you focus on the facts and what you know, the better your listener will respond.

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Phase III: Confusion and Uncertainty

This is where the "me" questions get asked. What does this mean for me? It often gets personal: anger, hurt feelings, complaints, bitterness. Many people wonder if they still matter and what will happen to them as a result of this change.

How to best communicate:

Offer support, along with information and facts. This is where people need others to listen, reassure them and validate concerns. They also want to bounce ideas around, but are not yet ready to problem solve just yet.

Phase IV: Search for Solutions

This is where we turn the corner and engage in inquiry. We are discussing alternatives, looking for options, seeing possibilities, finding the positive and engaging in constructive conversations. We also engage in joint problem solving and resolution, decisions or new directions.

How to best communicate:

Now is the time to inspire, motivate and problem solve. Your employees want ideas, options, opportunities and can actually begin action planning. They need encouragement, motivation and support. They are finally ready to problem solve and implement solutions, and as a manager, coach or peer, you can help them by focusing on the solution and helping them turn it into action.

It is critical that you tailor your communication to each phase of change. When someone is experiencing denial or betrayal, they aren't ready to listen to motivation or encouragement, and may actually disengage. In the phase of confusion and uncertainty, people aren't ready to problem solve, and will find that process frustrating. Once you can identify which phase a person is in, the goal is to give them the information they need, in the format they need it. This alone will help them move through each phase until they are ready to focus on solutions.



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My challenge for you this week is to choose an employee, peer or friend who is experiencing a change currently.

Identify the particular phase they are in. What does their behavior indicate?

What action can you take this week to communicate with them differently?

Let's remember that change is one constant we can always depend on. Although we can't often control the speed at which it arrives, we have complete control over how we respond, communicate and react to it.