



DEALING EFFECTIVELY WITH EMPLOYEES DURING THE ENDING

- **Inform your Employees About What Happened and Why.** Employees can accept that which they see to have been necessary for organisational survival, especially if it can be shown that management did all it could to avoid the negative consequences of change.
- **Explain to them what the Organisation is Doing to Help Those Affected by Change.** Knowing how those affected by change are being assisted will not only help employees with feelings of guilt for having survived a disaster, but also ease such worries as, how will they treat me?
- **Tell Key Contributors That They Are Important.** Your “stars” need to be told that they are such before they panic and run to the competition. Additionally, everyone needs to hear why they are essential to the reorganized operation and that you will be counting on them.
- **Refrain from unfavourable Comments about Employees Who Were Transferred, Demoted or Who Have Left.** “Bad-mouth” these employees and you risk losing respect and trust. Explain the criteria in general, using such terms as longevity, function, contribution, etc., but make it clear that none of those leaving would have had to leave were it not necessary to reorganize or cut back on staffing levels.
- **Refrain from promises that there Will Be No More Changes.** If the future is uncertain, it is better to be “up-front” and say so, while explaining what steps the organization is taking to avoid additional upheavals. If you give assurances that prove to be false in the near future, the resulting breakdown in trust will take years to recover from. Rather encourage employees to assist in a strategy to cope with changes constructively on all levels, so that future changes might have less negative impact on their well-being.
- **Allow for Venting of Natural, though Negative Feelings.** View this as a natural part of the grieving and healing process. As a leader or manager, be prepared for personal, verbal attacks.
- **Outline the New Vision for the Organization and for your Unit.** Make it clear where the organization is headed now, in terms of mission and goals and how your unit fits into that overall picture. Introduce values, formerly held or newly adopted and what the organization aspires to represent. Clarify top management’s vision for the future.
- **Explain What Actions Are Planned to make the Organization and your Unit a Success.** Employees need assurance that the organisation itself will survive and upheavals tend to raise doubts that this is the first step toward closing the doors. Explain what other strategies and plans the organization can follow to fulfil its mission and to achieve future profitability, competitiveness and growth. Also ask for their inputs, but only if you plan to really use it.
- **Over communicate!** For employees in the endings stage of transition, assume that much of what you communicate to reassure and reorient them will be lost due to feelings of upset or downright scepticism. Repetition is the key! Deliver the message in person, write memos, e-mail, post announcements, etc. Consistency of message, together with continuous updates can be very reassuring to employees that the ship is not rudderless and that someone is at the wheel. Speak to the Group and Meet One-on-One. Everyone needs to hear the same message as a team; followed by an individual message in which you affirm that person’s value and hear his or her concerns and feelings.



DEALING EFFECTIVELY WITH EMPLOYEES IN THE NEUTRAL ZONE

After the organizational change has taken place and the dust has settled, there is still a serious adjustment problem for the employees. Organisations can quickly implement change. Employees usually adjust more slowly to the change. During the Neutral Zone the employees are gradually adjusting to the organisation's change and it is critical that leaders take specific action to assist the employees in moving toward acceptance.

- **Involve Employees in Planning Implementation.** Staffs are often expected to do more with less. Front-line employees can often figure out better than anyone else how to reduce inefficiencies, errors, waste, roadblocks and unnecessary red tape, while increasing quality and client or customer satisfaction. Try to use their creativity and insights, both to achieve management goals and to help employees feel needed!
- **Clarify New Roles, Responsibilities and Performance Expectations.** Don't underestimate the sense of upheaval and confusion employees may experience when many of the old ways of functioning, which provided their sense of organizational identity, are suddenly "reinvented". If their new roles are yet to be worked out, say so and tell them how and when this will be done. The unknown is one of the greatest sources of fear.
- **When Possible, Look for Rules, Policies, Procedures, Reports and Approvals Which Can Be Eliminated.** This is really a part of organizational renewal or transformation. Think about this from the customer's or client's point of view. What could be done to make things go faster, smoother and more hassle free for those people the organization exists to serve? What temporary policies and procedures might be appropriate **until the dust settles**? Get all your staff involved in generating the answers!
- **Provide Training and Support for the Changes to Succeed.** Another tremendous source of fear is doubt about whether one can succeed in the new roles and responsibilities. Line up the necessary training. Provide ongoing, personalized coaching. Specify what results you expect. Show patience with the **learning curve**. Encourage feedback from employees on how the changes are working and be prepared to make needed adjustments.
- **Keep Employees engaged.** In most organizations this will be no problem. But in the middle of a change, if certain procedures, products or services are being discontinued, some employees may experience a temporarily lightened workload. Far from being a welcome relief, this can be excruciating to employees who are already insecure about their jobs. Plan projects and keep them productive!

In the first phase of change a lot is about dealing with emotions. In this phase we need to appeal to the rational, practical part of their minds which can plan, solve problems, see opportunities, etc. With some employees' strong emotions can still form a kind of **wall** surrounding the rational part of a person and **getting through** often requires that we continue to facilitate their **letting go** of these emotions.



EFFECTIVELY DEALING WITH EMPLOYEES DURING THE NEW BEGINNING

As employees reach the final stages of beginnings, active acceptance of the changes replaces passive resignation. In this stage, employees need to become committed to the organisation's vision of the future, take an active role in shaping it's future, adopt new values and attitudes and see the past problems as opportunities to become even more effective and productive.

- **Encourage a Pro-Active Stance that Seeks Opportunities.** Once employees have a realistic picture of where the organisation is going, you can help them move into Beginnings by asking them what they want to get from the new situation. Their initial answer may be vague or concrete and it may have to do with new skills, responsibilities or development. But this starts them thinking in terms of opportunities, which change always brings.
- **Advocate Problem-Solving, not grumbling.** While grumbling and venting often go together, it is essential to distinguish them. Venting involves expressing feelings such as, "I'm really angry," or "This whole thing leaves me totally confused." Venting can help employees deal with change. Grumbling involves complaining or criticizing, while taking no responsibility for solutions. Example: "This will never work". The appropriate response to grumbling is to get the employee, or group, to express what the problem is and to partner with them in taking ownership for finding creative ways to achieve goals with limited resources.
- **Plan for Easy "Wins" to Build Confidence.** The stage of Beginnings is often reached in very small steps. Perhaps, it is just having an employee go to lunch to meet someone from another department he or she will be working with on a newly formed task force. Celebrate small wins by communicating it big time!
- **Provide Prompt, Honest, Helpful Feedback.** This is good advice for leaders whose employees are learning a new task or function. It is especially important in helping employees overcome uncertainty about their ability to cope, adjust and continue to contribute to the organisation.
- **Recognize and Praise Progress.** Again, fairly standard advice, but infrequently followed! Who feels that they get enough affirmation, praise and appreciation from their bosses? When employees are suffering from doubts about competence and self-worth, every step of progress merit a minor celebration. It will also be a boost for you to see them soak it up!
- **Encourage teamwork within Your Unit and Among Other Units.** High-performance teams are increasingly the key to organisational success in today's highly competitive economy. Teamwork means more than traditional "cooperativeness" and "lending a hand." It involves breaking out of a narrow, assembly-line view of one's job and overcoming interdepartmental rivalries through cross-functional, interdisciplinary and multi-level teams. It also includes much greater exercise of a host of interpersonal communication skills than in the past, on everyone's part. Here you must truly lead by example!
- **Consider Rewards for Cost Savings.** Profit-sharing or gain-sharing may be outside your authority to implement, but many organisations are finding such approaches powerful motivators. Consider bonuses also. Special dinners or lunches to honor achievements, theater tickets, dinner for two, a day off, casual dress days, etc, can temporarily increase morale. But, they may be less meaningful than in the past. After a significant change, employees may become more "bottom-line" oriented. They want to profit significantly from their contributions.
- **Encourage Employees to Take Increased Responsibility for Managing Their Own Careers**
This suggestion flows naturally from the preceding one. Employees can no longer expect the organization to plan for their futures in a paternalistic way. They must keep abreast of organisation and industry needs and become perpetual learners with ample flexibility.