



# HEALTHQUEST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON  
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

## **CHANGE IS INEVITABLE, GROWTH IS OPTIONAL**

Our journey through life involves a series of changes - some major and many minor. Even though change has always been a part of life it seems that change is happening faster than ever before. This is especially evident in the workplace. Competition in a global marketplace, technological advances, changing demographics, and the speed of information transfer are just some of the influences that have had a dramatic impact on how organizations operate. Day-to-day work life is commonly filled with policy and procedure changes, shifting responsibilities, and expanding workloads. At the same time, our personal lives are often marked by competing demands and priorities.

Being able to adapt and respond effectively in a constantly changing world has become a necessary skill. And one that we can enhance and develop when we understand what goes on at a personal level when we are faced with change.

How we respond to change is a funny thing. There are times when we go out of our way to initiate change in our lives. For example, we may move house, city or country; change jobs or go back to school. Although we may be apprehensive about such changes, we are stimulated by the possibilities and opportunities that will emerge. When we initiate the change, we are likely to define the experience as exciting. On the other hand, these same changes might be imposed on us by circumstance, or the design of another person or our workplace. When change is imposed on us, our experience of the change is likely to be quite different. In these situations, we may feel threatened and fearful about the change, and focus heavily on negative outcomes. We may want little to do with the change and find ourselves resisting it fiercely.

### **MOVING FROM RESISTANCE TO ACCEPTANCE**

When we resist change, we knowingly or unknowingly

behave in ways that attempt to keep things 'the way they were'. Our attitudes and actions are not aligned with the new directions and we are likely to feel discomfort or tension as a result. To help ourselves move from resistance to acceptance, it can be useful to understand that there are varied reasons why people may resist or struggle with change it isn't simply because we think the old way is better.

When we find ourselves resisting or struggling with change, the first step is to ask ourselves WHY?

### **IT MAY BE BECAUSE... WE ARE CREATURES OF HABIT**

Being able to do things the same way provides us with a large element of predictability, stability, and comfort in our lives. When it comes to our responsibilities at work, once we have done things the same way for a certain length of time, we end up getting quite good at what we do. This degree of competence contributes to our sense of value or worth. When we are asked to make changes that impact how we do our job, our sense of comfort and competence becomes disrupted. We may at times feel insecure about our abilities.

It is important to recognize that it is natural to feel out of sorts and frustrated from time-to-time when we are embarking in new directions. Doing things differently takes effort and the course is never really clear. It's important to ask ourselves what knowledge or skills that we may be lacking and to seek these out. We may also benefit from making a goal that relates to doing our personal best within a changing environment, acknowledging that things will not go smoothly all of the times.

### **IT MAY BE BECAUSE... THE CHANGE INVOLVES A LOSS**

Certain life events, such as losing a loved one, involve an

obvious major loss. In such circumstances we understand that people will grieve their loss. However, with other sorts of change the losses we experience are not always obvious. And with workplace change, our workload is usually so full that it is hard to imagine that we've lost anything. However, as a result of the changes, we may not have the same opportunity to connect with certain people or certain activities that we've enjoyed. These subtle changes can translate into a loss, and leave us feeling amiss and reluctant to move forward with the changes.

Making a special effort to stay connected with people that are important to us can be helpful.

Identifying those aspects of the change that represent benefits for us personally will help us get a balanced perspective and orient us positively toward the change.

### **IT MAY BE BECAUSE... WE FEAR THE UNKNOWN**

During periods of change, when things are uncertain and unpredictable, we may fear or worry about the unknown. We may be anxious about where we are headed, and what the future will look like. We generally have a high need for information, and yet it is common for information to be sketchy or incomplete. In the workplace, a change in one area may require decisions in another that can't always be foreseen or articulated as quickly as we would like.

There are a number of things that we can do to help ourselves adapt to uncertainty or ambiguity:

First, ask how the change will affect our immediate situation; ask questions to clarify things that seem unclear; stay focused on the task at hand; focus on one step at a time or one day at a time. To minimize worry about what lies ahead ask yourself the question 'is there anything that I can do about this matter?'

If yes, then identify the action to be taken. If not, acknowledge that 'I have no control over this matter' and focus on those things that you can influence.

We can learn from our past experience of change by asking 'have I been through anything like this before?' or 'how did I get through it and what seemed to work?'

### **POSITIVE ORIENTATION TOWARDS CHANGE**

No matter what change we are faced with in life, it will be much easier to cope with and adapt to if we hold a positive attitude about change in general. This doesn't mean that we necessarily have to agree with the circumstances or details

of the change. In fact we may disagree with it, but can still adapt to it in a constructive manner.

Having a positive orientation towards change involves:

knowing what we can and cannot control in a given situation recognizing that disruptions are a natural response to change

- ▲ being creative and looking for the opportunities that change
- ▲ creates
- ▲ recognizing that there are a number of right ways to do things
- ▲ utilizing our personal resources and strengths to actively do the best we can
- ▲

### **BEING AWARE AND TAKING CARE**

Having a positive orientation towards change will go a long way in minimizing the stress that we may experience during times of change. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of our stress levels, and to take special care of ourselves during these times. This means ensuring that we are getting enough rest, eating healthily, and participating in activities such as exercise, relaxation techniques, and hobbies that help us get away from this stress. Many people find that speaking with an EAP counsellor can be helpful during periods of heightened change.

We each have an active role to play in how we respond and adapt to change that we experience in life. Understanding this will make it much easier to take advantage of the opportunities for learning, and personal growth that do exist amidst change.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP counsellors to arrange a telephone or in-person counselling session.

All contact between you and your counsellor is completely confidential.

**English Service: 1-800-387-4765**  
**French Service: 1-800-361-5676**  
**General Information: 1-888-814-1328**