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# Adapting to Change

Most people aren't fond of change. We like our habits and prefer stability to the uncertainty and upheaval that often come with change. We prefer to feel secure rather than to feel destabilized by change. But we also know that change is an integral part of life; there's no such thing as a life without change. That's precisely what makes change paradoxical: we don't really like it, but we couldn't imagine life if it stayed the same.

When you think about it, change has always been part of our lives. For example, ever since childhood, we've learned to live with the changes happening in our body. We've had to deal with all sorts of events, some positive, some not so positive, which we struggled with until we regained our sense of balance. In fact, both our professional life and personal life are characterized by periods of instability that we have to work through until we re-establish our sense of equilibrium.

And every time we're faced with a change, we generally go through more or less the same stages.

Humans don't like instability or uncertainty. We prefer to have a clear idea of where we're going. That's why one of our first reactions to change is anxiety. Even if you know that change is part of life, even if you're excited by certain changes (e.g. having a baby), it's always the same story: You feel that pang in the pit of your stomach, and you ask yourself, "What have I gotten myself into?" or "Why is this happening to me."

## **The change process**

Soon enough, you start to figure out why you're worried about this change. For one thing, you realize that this change will make you lose certain things you took for granted, things you felt good about; in other words, you'll have to move out of your comfort zone.

Also, the idea of not knowing exactly where you're headed, not being sure you'll be able to deal with this change, makes you feel insecure: "Wait a minute! I'm not sure I like this! What if I can't deal with this change? What if I can't do what I need to do? What if I fail?"

This is a crucial step because you have to grieve the loss of your comfort zone, and risk moving forward into the unknown.

After a while you get to the point where you realize you have no choice; you have to deal with the change. This frame of mind helps you to look ahead and actively explore what this change will involve, how it will affect you, what behaviours and habits you'll have to change, and what skills you'll need to develop.

At this stage, even though you may still feel somewhat fearful about the change, you realize that there's no turning back. You have to become proactive about the change, ask questions, learn new things, get involved, and work at re-establishing your sense of equilibrium.

Without necessarily realizing it, exploring the opportunities that change presents and developing adaptive skills and attitudes can help you deal with the change. You gradually find that you've established a new sense of equilibrium or stability, and you begin to feel more comfortable with the change and more competent with new responsibilities.

## **What can you do?**

Some people adapt quickly to a particular change, while others take more time, depending on the magnitude of the change, the presence of other changes or stressors, and coping skills. However, there are helpful strategies that can help you adapt more easily to change:

1. Don't get overly alarmed. It's normal that change makes you feel uncomfortable, at least for a certain amount of time.
2. Try to figure out how the change affects you. Adapting to change requires you to leave behind comfortable old habits and behaviours. It also requires you to make room for new behaviours that you don't necessarily feel you've mastered yet. Take the time to figure out what bothers you about the change; this will help you move forward.
3. Ask questions. Confront rumours, and clarify the things you're worried about. Don't just sit there and let change happen to you. Find out what you can about the changes that are happening and try to get involved with influencing (or supporting) their direction.
4. Keep a positive attitude! You'll need all your energy to motivate yourself and learn to deal with this change. Don't waste your energy on negative thinking that gets you nowhere.
5. Review your skills, and be proactive to update or improve them. What skills will you need to deal with this change? What can you do to acquire or improve these skills?
6. Talk about your feeling and reactions with people you trust (e.g., a spouse, relative, co-worker or friend). This may be a good time to ask trusted others for their support and advice.
7. Take care of yourself. During this transition period, it's important to enjoy yourself, go out with friends or family, get some exercise, and pursue your hobbies. It will help you recharge your batteries and perhaps even gain a new perspective on the situation.

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