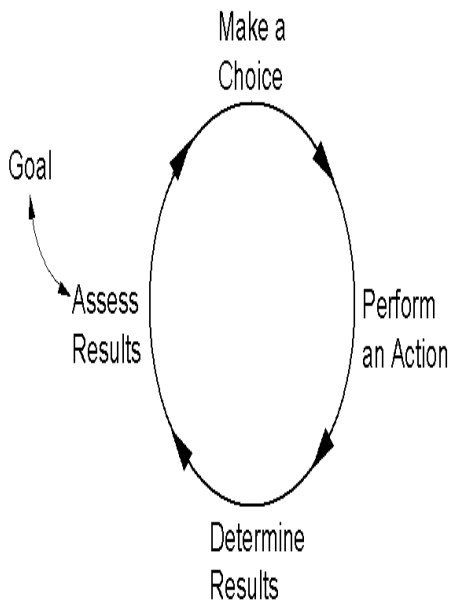




## Managing Change Effectively During Times of Uncertainty

By Charlie Griffin, M.S.

Change at its best is a time of opportunity and growth, of excitement about new possibilities. But at its worst, it can be a highly stressful, destructive period when effectiveness falls apart both organizationally and personally. While every challenge and resulting change is unique, there are some basics to keep in mind.



### **The Cycle of Change**

There are many models of how people respond to change. But in general, change forces us to:

- Step outside of our **comfort zone** where we feel competent and in control.
- Generally enter into phases of **anger, resistance**, shock, denial, resentment, frustration, and trying to forestall or avoid undesirable change.
- Eventually realize that change may be unavoidable, so we start to “look over the chasm” by **bargaining**, negotiating, learning what we can and can’t control and where we may have any influence in the outcome.
- **Explore our options** and **accept** that change will occur and decide to work with it - we begin to work effectively toward planning and defining the future, with problem-solving, goal-setting, new energy, strength, and leadership.
- Finally, as our world settles into a new level of organization and we adjust, we find new **commitment** and work to make the change effective and successful.

### **Why Do People Resist Change?**

- People do not fear, resist, or resent change in and of itself!
- They fear the unknown, unfamiliar, and uncertain.... often for good reasons.
- They understandably resist being forced to alter well-established habits.
- They react negatively to any perceived threat to their authority, status, security, or comfort zones.
- They resent unilaterally dictated change without the opportunity to participate in planning the change, because it emphasizes their lack of control and helplessness in creating a good outcome.
- They resist change if they are not intellectually convinced it is in the best interests of the organization.

### **Guidelines for Effective Change Management**

- **Avoid the stressors to begin with!**
  - Do good future planning, don’t wait till you’re blindsided! Think about the current changes and discuss implications down the road.
  - Focus on the big issues. Some changes will work themselves out no matter what you do. Some take your careful attention. Focus on the ones that most need your attention. Prioritize!
  - As they say, pick your battles carefully.

- **Emphasize CHOICE and CONTROL!**
  - Take all possible steps to emphasize where individuals can have control of changes impacting them.
  - Ask for input; involve people appropriately in the planning process.
  - Determine the areas where you can have impact and put your energy there, and encourage others to do the same, focusing on the interests that are most important to them at a personal and organizational level.
  
- **PREDICT stressor events ahead of time!**
  - Even when change is inevitable, stressful, and out of your control, having advance warning helps.
  - Provide as much information as soon as possible to stakeholders.
  - Talk about “what if’s” and alternatives.
  - Prediction allows people to do “anticipatory grieving” and rehearsal so they will be better prepared to respond competently when the event actually occurs.
  - If nothing else, try to give affected persons a timetable of when and how the changes may unfold.
  
- **Alter the PERCEPTION (change the meaning)**
  - Even when we can’t control and can’t predict change, we have choices about how we choose to perceive them. This refers to the “crisis” vs. “opportunity” aspects of change.
  - This takes time. When first confronted with change, it’s asking a lot for people to immediately look at the bright side. Give that cycle of change time to roll around!
  - People don’t move through the cycle with the same timing. Some people are ready to move quickly to optimism, some take more time. Some fall back to early emotions and reactions in the midst of planning and new activities. Expect this to happen in groups and be ready to take the time to work with the personal and group dynamics that result.
  
- **Increase Supportive Resources for coping and recovery!**
  - Effective organizations plan for providing support in change management and don’t just allow it to happen with no forethought.
  - Resources should involve both support for personal adjustment and adaptation as well as organizational communication, development, and planning.

## **A Four Step Guide to Helpful Conversations about Change**

*Focus on:*

1. **FACTS**...clarify information!
  - a. clarify the need to know what, how, when, who,
  - b. and WHY.
  
2. **THOUGHTS**...
  - a. encourage reflection, and
  - b. clarification
  
3. **FEELINGS**...
  - a. explore,
  - b. allow, and
  - c. encourage expression
  
4. **REASSURANCE & TEACHING**