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(1) Challenge of the Day - Change, Will it Never End?

The saying “The only constant is change” is true. While almost all aspects of our lives (relationships, living arrangements, physical capacity) change constantly, in this issue of Leadership Today we will address workplace changes that most significantly affect employees – the realignment of duties.

As a manager, you may be responsible for leading your work group through a transition associated with the realignment of duties and, you may even be the one who announces the transition. Your leadership – how you make the announcement and guide staff through the transition – can make the difference between success and failure.

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(2) Exploring the Issue – Helping Your Workgroup Navigate Transition

Q. I’ve just been told by upper management that my unit will be taking on the work of another unit that is being disbanded. So, we’re going to have to make a number of staffing realignments. I’m not exactly sure how the realignment will look. Upper management hasn’t decided yet when they’re going to make the announcement to the group that is scheduled to be disbanded. After they have analyzed our workforce demographics and identified a plan for the realignment, the announcement to staff will be made.

I’ll be expected to tell my group about these changes and their new work assignments. My people have gone through a lot of changes recently and I just don’t know how they’re going to react. What’s the right way to talk with them and support them so they get through this and remain productive? And, with this new work, they’re going to have to be even more productive now than they’ve been in the past. Help!

- A. Whew, your work group is facing many challenges – taking on new and additional work, changing responsibilities, reestablishing working relationships, and perhaps losing valued colleagues from the disbanded unit. They will also face managing fears about the future for them as an intact work group. You, as the leader, face not only these challenges, but also the challenge of how to help the group navigate these transitions while simultaneously dealing with your own concerns.

Whatever pre-planning you can participate in will inform you and help you to be prepared for any questions you may be asked. If possible, ask for a meeting with upper management and other managers whose units will be taking on more work and/or personnel. Also be sure to invite a representative from Human Resources (HR), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and (if applicable) a union representative.

A pre-planning meeting(s) will help to clarify key points about the transition such as reasons for the change, timing of the announcement(s), a long-term communications plan, the support being provided to employees who will be leaving, and the expectations of and support for the work groups gaining the additional duties.

Also, you should have a clear picture of why these changes are occurring. Without that understanding, you may have trouble articulating the rationale for the changes in a compelling fashion. And when changes are seen as happening without good reason, they will usually be resisted in one fashion or another. Where possible, try to implement a communication plan that provides the rationale for the changes, has integrity, uses multiple modalities (e.g., email, meetings, written guidelines), and involves frequent discussions with staff. The communications plan should convey an awareness of the emotional reactions that employees and their families will have, as well as resources that will help them through the transition.

The announcement of the realignment preferably should be made to employees early in the week or day. While this will necessarily mean that there will be some loss of focus and productivity in the following hours and days, it will provide the opportunity to respond to questions as they arise, reinforce the messages in the announcement or communication plan, allow for mutual support among the employees, and diminish the perceptions that management staff is trying to avoid dealing with issues.

Let's see how such a situation might play out in the example below:

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(3) Play it Out – When Your Organization is Dealing With Change

The Dynamics

Meeting with the other managers

You need to know more about the changes – what they are, why the changes need to be made, what's going to happen to the employees, and when all this will be announced.

Your employees' reactions to the change will be based, in part, on whether the decisions seem just, fair, and equitable.

The Conversation/Action

Meeting with the other managers

"Thanks for bringing us all together. It's really important that we all know what's going on so we can explain it clearly to our employees. Can we talk about the reasons for this change?"

"I can understand why this is necessary. And I think I can present it to my people so they can understand it. They're going to be concerned about how the employees that work in the unit that is being eliminated will

Elicit information so that you feel comfortable in not only understanding the reasoning, but also that the decisions were fair.

Another major concern for employees will center around their sense of security and fear of loss of income, status, predictability, etc. Find out how the agency will be handling the issue of employees who may be affected by a reduction in force (RIF).

You understand the reasoning behind and need for the change, but still have other questions.

Before you make the announcement

You have the information about the rationale behind the changes and what's going to happen to the employees in the group that's being disbanded, but you're worried about how some of your employees are going to react. Plus, you have your own worries about how this is going to affect you and how your own family will react.

be treated.

What will we be doing to help them?

How many employees will NOT be able to transfer to other units here? They will want to know if they'll have to move to another area in order to keep their federal jobs. How will we be supporting them?

And when will I be expected to tell my folks? We don't want to do it at the end of the day or week. That just gives them time to stew and make things up on their own to fill any information gaps.

We need to be able to answer their questions quickly and honestly, even if it means saying 'I'm sorry, I don't know the answer but will try to find out.' I know this will be upsetting to a lot of people and we'll have a disruption in getting things done. But that's going to happen regardless of when we tell them.

How will we deal with rumors?

How will the transition be implemented?"

Before you make the announcement

It's important to be aware of your own reactions and needs in this difficult situation.

Call the EAP to consult with a counselor about how to best deal with the emotions you might expect – shock, anger, fear, and sadness. Make use of the resources you and your employees have – the EAP, its 24x7 availability for counseling, the EAP website, and perhaps even the work/life component to the EAP. Talk with your HR about other agency resources.

At the announcement meeting

Let the employees know what is happening and why.

Talk with them about how the employees in the disbanded unit will be taken care of.

To the extent possible, involve your employees in the decision-making and planning for the changes. People have a much greater buy-in and support for things they've had a voice in.

Acknowledge that the option selected may not be the permanent solution.

At the announcement meeting

"An announcement is being made across the agency about some changes that will affect us. I personally wanted to make the announcement and talk about this with you because we're in this together and need to deal with it in the best way possible. What's happening is this..."

"The reasons it is happening are ..."

"We're the best group to absorb these responsibilities because..."

"This affects all of us. Before we talk about us though, I want to let you know that the employees from the disbanded unit are eligible for priority placement for local area positions they qualify for and they'll be given the opportunity to train for other local jobs too. The agency is doing everything possible to minimize any hardships and help the employees in the disbanded unit transition to different jobs if possible."

"These are the responsibilities that our unit will now have. It has not yet been decided how we're going to accomplish all this and so we're going to be dealing with some initial uncertainty and we need to work together."

I want a working group to get together to draft out some possibilities and give them to me. Who's willing to be on that team? I'll need those options by ..."

"It may take some time until we can implement a reorganization plan that will work best. So be aware that we may need to reshuffle our assigned duties and functions until we settle on the most efficient program."

During this time, we all need to be flexible. We should be careful we don't automatically settle on a solution too quickly. I need your input throughout. "

You're asked questions you don't have the answer to.

Expect some negativity. There's a lot of grumbling, or at least an undercurrent of anger and/or anxiety.

There will likely be some initial lack of focus of the work group. This is normal, and while you need to acknowledge it and take it into account, don't let go of the work standards. If you notice the diminished focus, you may want to say something like:

There will be some employees who "come on board" quickly, others who do not.

It will take time for some employees to accept the changes. Try to involve them in the decision-making or planning. Acknowledge their concerns, but don't allow them to ignore the need to adapt to the changes.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know the answer to that. I'll do my best to find out and will get back to you about what I find by tomorrow at this time."

"I know there are many of you who are concerned about what this means for you now and in the future. We've all successfully gone through changes in the past and we'll get through this.

It may be hard to think about right now, but this change gives us a chance to look at what we do and find a way to do things differently -- better. Until things get settled, I will be meeting with you on a regular basis (every day, two days), and letting you know what the latest information is, even if there's nothing new."

"There may be some of you who feel so upset or concerned that you want to talk to someone in addition to or instead of your co-workers, friends, or family. Please remember that you have the EAP available to you for consultation or counseling. The counseling is free, confidential, and provided by professionals. Your family members may have their own reactions to this news. They too can use the EAP."

"This news of organizational restructuring has made things uncertain for all of us.

It's normal that it's difficult to focus on work tasks. However, we still have our work to do. We need to continue to do our best. I'm counting on you to be as dedicated and professional as you've always been."

There will likely be a going-away gathering for those in the disbanded unit. If invited, participate in the event with your employees. Encourage staff participation in planning the event.

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(4) Tips of the Day

When bringing employees together to resolve issues amicably, keep in mind the following:

- Communication is key. Let people know what's going on. Be visible and approachable.
- Expect a wide range of reactions – some employees will be angry, others anxious, while some will appear to exhibit no apparent feelings. This is normal.
- This is a stressful time. Take care of yourself. Exercise, eat well, sleep, do things you enjoy, be with family and friends. Attend to whatever you find spiritual and fulfilling in your life.
- Don't try to do everything yourself. Ask for help and delegate if you can.
- The more involvement your employees have in effecting the change, the more they'll be supportive of it. When possible, include employees in decisions that affect their work environment.
- You may feel like you've lost control. Where you can, take advantage of things you can control.
- Look for and celebrate early "victories" in the transition.
- Look for "positives" resulting from the change.
- Get continuous consultation from your supervisor, HR, and the EAP.

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(5) Include EAP in Planning!

EAP counselors are available to support managers, supervisors, and employees during periods of transition. If your agency is dealing with an upcoming change, consult with the EAP early, during your planning phase, to discuss how best to support employees throughout the change process.

Although employees are generally not prepared to talk with an EAP counselor at the time your agency makes an announcement about an organizational change, you can arrange for the EAP to provide services periodically throughout the transition, with the specific activities, and timing thereof, targeted to have the greatest positive impact. Some services the EAP can provide include:

- A statement about EAP supportive services made at the meeting announcing the change
- Distribution of facts sheets, tips and tools for managing change
- Presentation on Coping with Change and Transition
- Support services to help employees address individual concerns
- Management consultations

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(6) Resources to Make Your Day

- Employees, managers, and family members coping with the stress of workplace changes may benefit from engaging in FOH's new online presentation, *Stress Management: Building Resiliency*. You can access this program at www.foh4you.com. Locate it under *My Benefits*, then click on *Stress Management: Building Resiliency*. The presentation includes an engaging audio-visual presentation and very practical and helpful handouts that can be downloaded and printed.
- There are a number of EAP presentations available to help supervisors and employees deal with change more effectively. These include *Transitions in the Workplace – Coping with Change*; *Transitions in the Workplace – for Employees*; *Managing Change*; and *Coping with Downsizing and Job Loss (Employees)*. FOH's list of worksite presentations is available online on our website (www.foh.dhhs.gov/Public/WhatWeDo/Training/EAPtrainings.asp). If you have any questions about scheduling EAP presentations, contact your agency EAP Point of Contact.
- Change can frequently cause stress. For information on stress and managing stress go to the FOH website at www.foh4you.com. Enter the site with or without registering. Click on *Library & Resources* (center top). Click on *Self-assessments*. Then click on *Stress*.
- You will find resources and guidance for managers and supervisors at www.FOH4you.com. Click on *Library and Resources* at the top of the home page, then click on the letter *M* under *Library Catalog*. Next, click on *Managing Change*. You will find 65 useful articles about dealing with a wide variety of change ranging from job loss and military deployment to promotions and having a family member with cancer.
- FOH provides a range of Organizational Development (OD) services, including team building, organizational assessments, conflict resolution and mediation. For more information, visit the FOH website or call Julie Dunwald, Ph.D., at 206-615-2638 (jdunwald@psc.gov).

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(7) About this E-Magazine and How to Contribute a Topic

About the author: Retired from the Air Force after 21 years as a clinical psychologist, Brian Sugden, Ph. D., has worked with FOH since 2000 as a behavioral occupational health expert in program development and management in the areas of employee assistance, workplace violence prevention, and critical incident management.

The FOH EAP provides assessment, counseling, referral, training and consultation to Federal employees and agencies worldwide. The goal of this e-magazine is to help Federal leaders address their workplace relationship concerns. Please let us know topics you're interested in by contacting Diane Stephenson, Ph. D., at 312-886-3942 (DStephenson@psc.gov).

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