**Factsheet**

Managing Individual Reactions to Change

Change Curve: An Experiential Model

People dealing with personal loss and bereavement often experience a cycle ranging from initial shock, denial, anger and anxiety before moving to acceptance/action (commitment). It’s not unusual for people to experience a similar journey during major change. The speed and duration of the cycle varies depending on the individual, the degree of change and its impact. And it’s not always a one-way journey. People may feel they have come to terms with a change only to have something unexpectedly throw them off course and they find themselves back experiencing worry or anger. This sort of ‘flip-flopping’ is quite common.

Figure 1: Examples of change curves.

 

There are ways to help people through the change curve:

| Shock. | Denial/anger. | Worry/confusion. | Relief and acceptance. |
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| * Get everything out in the open with as much information as possible and repeat it.
* Be realistic with promises even if it means saying ‘I don’t know. I’ll have to get back to you’.
* Be alert to how people are reacting.
* Be available, patient and non-defensive. Don’t argue too much.
* Accept there will be strong emotions – good and bad feelings – and don’t tell people how they should feel.
* Allow time for people to absorb what’s happening.
 | * Offer clear instructions.
* Check for understanding, challenge assumptions and deal with concerns and rumours.
* Be specific about what is required.
* Establish shorter time frames.
* Follow up and keep checking in with people.
* Empathise.
 | * Accept emotional displays.
* Provide opportunities to sound off.
* Listen and be supportive.
* Keep people involved, motivated and build success experiences.
* Continue direct control with clear expectations.
* Tolerate mistakes and some inefficiency.
* Communicate.
 | * Expect some setbacks. People will ‘flip back’ at times.
* Allow for differences in recovery time.
* Reinforce hopefulness and be optimistic.
* Continue to build the team spirit.
* Manage closely and provide constructive feedback.
* Reward and emphasise achievements.
* Highlight benefits and positive.
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**Adapted with permission from material attributed to:** The Office for the Public Sector, the Government of South Australia, Change Management Resources 2014, Sourced on 3 February 2016, http://publicsector.sa.gov.au/culture/change-management-toolkit/