

## DEALING WITH CHANGE

“When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully at the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.”

– Alexander Graham Bell

Organizational change. . .in a time where “downsizing” and “reorganization” are common buzzwords, it becomes easy to understand why change is one of the most feared processes in our society. At the same time, it is one of our most necessary - and inevitable - factors in life. Change in an organization can stem from many sources: the election of new officers, a decrease in funding, even the addition of new group members. Regardless of its origin and why it is occurring, handling organizational change in an appropriate manner is critical if the group is to flourish. Here are a few tips that can help encourage change while getting members to support it:

- Be honest. Do not try to cover up changes or “sugar coat” them for your group members. Nine times out of ten, they will discover what is truly happening and may become resentful toward you for your dishonesty.
- Enthusiasm sells! Be as energetic and enthusiastic about the change as you possibly can. If the change is unavoidable (i.e. your beloved group vice-president is graduating and leaving the group) you may not feel especially enthusiastic about it, but there is no point in bringing the team down.
- Make it personal. Explain what the change means to your individual members. This will allow them to feel included as well as prepare them for what they may experience.
- Two heads are better than one. Do not try to make and/or handle organizational changes by yourself. Most likely, your group members will appreciate an opportunity to give their input, which will make them more supportive of the change.
- Be timely. As soon as you know a change will occur, let your group know. Do not allow time for rumors to grow and threaten your credibility.

The above guidelines can be used whether you are making changes or outside circumstances are making the changes for your group. If you are initiating changes to increase your group’s effectiveness or improve its mission, you may want to make a mental note of the following hints:

- Don’t strive for surprises. Many of us love to be surprised – typically in areas like birthday parties, gifts, bonuses. The element of surprise in organizational change, however, is not something to aim for. Make your plans clear and outline each step.
- Change is trendy? Don’t make changes just for the sake of making changes. Take the time to think them through and weigh the pros and cons. If the cons far outweigh the pros, it may not be the most appropriate time to make such changes.
- Patience, my friend. Changes are not made overnight. There are bound to be some obstacles along the way. Do not get upset with group members if they make mistakes or resort to the “old way” every so often – change takes time.
- Consider the alternatives. If you do not make this change, what will happen to your group?

Are there other, less threatening changes you could make? What may prevent this change from being positive? Think through the positives and negatives to making the change and be aware of challenges you may encounter before putting your change in motion.

- Ponder the past. If the change you want to implement has been attempted in the past, review how it turned out. If it was successful, why? If it flopped, why? Just because something did not work in the past does not mean it won't work now, but if you can prepare yourself for possible outcomes, you will increase your chances of success.
- Watch for danger signs. Just as in carpentry, do not follow the "If it doesn't fit, force it!" rule. If you come across signs of distress or resistance regarding the change, talk to your group and find out why people are dissatisfied. Work together to make changes positive for everyone.
- Change as a research project. Research your change before implementing it. Talk to others, ask for suggestions, see if it has been done in the past. As we have been told, before you build a mousetrap, it helps to know if there are any mice out there!
- Never mind. Sometimes—even after a valiant effort by the group leader and members—changes do not seem to be as effective in actuality as they were in theory. If you have tried and adapted and still feel the changes will not work, acknowledge that and move on.

Flexibility is key when a group experiences change. Be willing to bend a bit here and there, and keep those lines of communication open. The end result? A productive, cohesive team ready to tackle any other changes that come along.

### **References:**

St. Norbert College Programming Office. (1994). "Analysis of Change."  
CPOResource.

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