

Dealing with Change

Around 475 BC, a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus stated that “No man ever steps into the same river twice.” His point was that the river water was constantly moving and therefore changing. Twenty centuries later, we can all agree that change is a major fact of modern life.

Resistance to change: Whether in our personal lives or in the workplace, many of us actively resist change. There are three reasons for this:

- We are creatures of habit.
- We feel threatened by impending change.
- We feel safe within established norms.

Especially in the workplace where technology and processes are constantly evolving, change takes us out of our comfort zones. While most of us overcome our initial fears and successfully adapt, some will actively resist change. They do this not because they are “rebels” but because change triggers worries, concerns and self-doubts. “Change resisters” may find fault with the proposed change; delay and complicate implementation; try to recruit fellow resisters and in extreme cases try to sabotage the change.

But by actively resisting change, individuals actually *increase* their stress – the very condition they are trying to avoid by maintaining the status quo! A far healthier response would be to “try change on for size.” It will seem foreign at first, but may end up benefiting us in the long run. After all, if we had resisted change in 1975, we’d still be dressing like the cool “disco-dude” in the picture! This does not mean that we cannot ask honest questions when change is imminent. In

most cases, senior management encourages such questions. When confronted with change, several strategies are recommended:

- Ask questions respectfully if you have doubts.
- Envision a time when the “new way” becomes the “usual way.”
- Don’t get sucked into the negativity trap
- Don’t *catastrophize* or *awfulize* the impending change. Keep an open mind.
- Take good care of yourself physically during the change process.
- Exercise away your fears and frustrations.
- Maintain your perspective.



Remember that *you* may be creating stress by dwelling on unfounded fears or constantly playing the **HAIWB** tape in your head (how awful it will be!).

If personal, family, financial or workplace change is a concern for you, be aware that your feelings are common and understandable. Rather than suffer in silence, you may choose to confront your fears by contacting a professional EAP counselor to discuss them specifically and confidentially. In addition to neutralizing your current discomfort, you may also develop a new mental framework for dealing with change in the future. For as Heraclitus put it, “There is nothing permanent on this earth except change.” And this includes fashion – see above!