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## CARE's WorkLife Solutions Weekly Wire

### Coping With Change

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This weeks Weekly Wire is taken from one of the many articles found on our website. To access this article, log-on to [www.caresworklifesolutions.com](http://www.caresworklifesolutions.com). Click on the World Icon and enter your unique company password (please call us if you do not know your company password or if you would like a temporary password). Locate the green Menu Bar near the top of the page and click on "Working," then select "Effective Manager." To the right you will see a list of topics that are relative to the main category (Working) and the sub-category (Effective Manager). Select "Change." You will find the topic "Coping With Change" under the Article section. You will also find other relative resources, such as other articles on Change, an Audio presentation entitled, "Change is Inevitable," and a Skill-BUILDER on "Managing Change." We urge you to use this method to find information on a multitude of topics on our website.

### Coping With Change

"Nothing endures but change."

- Heraclitus

Heraclitus had it right: Change is a fact of life. In the Greek philosopher's time, change tended to unfold gradually. But today's world changes at an alarmingly rapid pace. Thanks to television and the Internet, images and information zip around the globe in seconds, and we're sometimes expected to respond just as quickly.

Change can take many forms and affect every aspect of our lives. It occurs in our family, work, social life, and well-being. Some changes involve additions, such as births, new friends or relationships, and new possessions. Others involve losses, such as death, divorce, or illness. Some changes are sudden, such as losing your job, while others are more gradual, such as entering middle age.

Change can be good or bad, depending on the person and the circumstances. For example, a divorce may be seen as a tragedy or a relief. A promotion is generally viewed as a change for the good, but if you're anxious or unsure of your skills, you may view it as negative or threatening. Change may be sought out, appreciated or accepted, or it may be forced upon you, and resented or resisted. It can challenge or stimulate you, or make you feel anxious and threatened. Too little change can make life boring or depressing, while too much change can be uncomfortable or overwhelming.

Whatever its form, change requires an adjustment of some kind. This takes energy and, when the demands are too great, it can drain you physically and mentally. Change creates stress, so it needs to be managed effectively to prevent the development of stress-related symptoms and illnesses. Unmanaged stress can cause physical and emotional disorders, including everything from headaches and digestive problems to high blood pressure and insomnia.

The key to coping with change is to recognize it, understand its effects, and bring it—or your responses to it—under control as much as possible. When you can't control the change itself, adjusting your attitude toward it can help lessen any stress or tension. You'll stay healthier that way.

## What to Know About Change

### Strive for moderate change.

Change is stressful, even when it's positive and welcome. But no change at all can make us feel like we're stagnating. Strive for balance. Too much stress at once, or even a moderate amount of stress over a long period of time, can be unhealthy. People who experience a lot of changes in a brief period—within a year, for instance—are more likely to experience an accident or illness within that period than people who face fewer changes, research shows.

### Try to see the opportunities in change.

The Chinese word for crisis is made up of two symbols: the symbol for danger and the symbol for opportunity. Try to think of change as a mixture of crisis (or danger, or uncertainty) and opportunity. Ask yourself what lesson you might learn, what skill you might develop, or what aspect of yourself you might strengthen as a result of coping with this change.

### Physical health will support mental health.

During times of change and high stress, remember that regular exercise, a balanced diet, and adequate sleep is needed to maintain your ability to cope.

### Physical and Emotional Aspects of Change

Evaluate your life on a regular basis—every few months or so—to determine how many significant changes you are experiencing. Just being aware will make it easier for you to understand and deal with the stress that almost always accompanies change.

The physical symptoms of change can be unsettling, to say the least. Change can cause all sorts of stress-related symptoms and disorders, such as

- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Digestive problems
- Muscle tension and backaches
- High blood pressure and cardiac problems
- Impaired immune response
- Depression or anxiety
- Irritability
- Eating too much or too little
- Alcohol or drug abuse

If you can, **schedule planned changes so that not too many occur at once**. For example, if you're getting married, buying a new house, and coping with an ailing parent, it's probably a good idea to hold off on looking for a new job until you've had time to adjust to these other changes.

When you find yourself faced with an unexpected change, take a moment to **evaluate your emotional response**. Ask yourself how you're feeling. Are you happy, sad, scared, angry, threatened, resentful, excited, indifferent? After you've determined what you're feeling, it can help to ask yourself some or all of the following questions:

- Is my reaction justified?
- Is the intensity of my reaction justified by the facts?
- Am I overreacting, or misinterpreting?
- Is there another way to look at this? Is there an opportunity here?
- Are there aspects of this situation that I can control?
- Would more information help me cope better with this change?

**Learn a relaxation exercise.** Relaxation is one of the most effective tools for managing stress and the anxiety or tension that can go along with it. Relaxation helps your body undo the negative effects of stress and can keep you functioning better physically and mentally.

Don't forget, humor goes a long way toward easing stress. **Try to find the humor in situations**, and in yourself, whenever possible.

Don't expect to have to weather every change alone. **Look for support from family or friends**. Humor helps here, too.

## FAQs

### **Only unwanted changes create problems, right?**

No, not really. Any change places demands on you, whether it's one that's wanted, such as a raise, a birth, or marriage; or one that's not, such as a job loss, a death, or divorce. It's important to be aware of major changes in your life so you can take steps to cope effectively.

### **Things at work always seem to be changing, especially lately. How can I cope with changes when I have little or no control over them?**

First, ask yourself whether it's really true that you don't have control over the changes. Is there a staff meeting, suggestion box, or committee at work that allows you to make suggestions before changes are decided? Even if the changes are ones you don't like, you may feel better knowing you at least had some say about them.

Second, try to view change as a natural and healthy part of life. A company that doesn't change is unlikely to grow and survive. That goes for people, too. Accept change as inevitable and look for ways to make the change work to your advantage when possible. See it as an opportunity, not a crisis. Sometimes, changing your attitude is the best strategy for coping with change.

### **I just turned 50. My friends and family threw me a big birthday party, yet I'm really feeling down. I'm already getting mail from the AARP—but I'm not ready to be put out to pasture. Everyone assumes I'm happy, but I feel terrible. What's wrong with me?**

You may be stressed out about getting older, and turning 50 is a stark reminder of this. You knew it was coming, but you still may not feel prepared. With age come changes in lifestyle and self-image—and a sense of mortality. This can be very stressful, yet others may not realize you're going through this.

As you move from stage to stage in your development, you'll face unique crises and opportunities. Don't be surprised to find yourself confronting stress at most, if not all, of these stages:

- Moving from adolescence to early adulthood
- Turning 30 (or 40, 50, etc.)
- Becoming a parent
- Reaching midlife
- Becoming a grandparent
- Retiring

Being aware that these are normal, predictable phases of life can help you prepare, cope with and minimize stress.