Strategies for Leadership through Change

Keep the familiar

Change can feel jarring and can throw us off center. The familiar feels comforting, and can re-center us when we feel thrown off. So keeping what is familiar in the midst of change—sticking to a familiar routine, doing familiar work, seeing familiar people, going to familiar places—helps tremendously.

As leaders, it’s important to remind your colleagues of the many things that have remained the same. Remember our mission and our values. Remember our goals, big and small, and our strategic priorities.

Be gentle with yourself

When we’re going through change, as much as we try to do well in other areas of our life, sometimes we cannot. Recognize that change is hard and cut yourself some slack. By being gentle with ourselves, we are better able to make transitions, and can help serve those around us. Shame paralyzes us and does not foster learning from our experiences.

Acknowledge emotions

An increased level of empathy and understanding is important and must be felt from the top down. People expect life to be easy and when it is not, they need assurances that employers are concerned and will do as much as possible to assist them during unsettling times.

Foster emotional intelligence

Creating space for employees to become aware of their own feelings is also important. Without a good grasp and understanding of our feelings, we often manifest anger in counterproductive behavior. Encourage employees to dissipate stress in a productive manner by doing more of the things they enjoy, like exercising, volunteering, spending time with family.

You may also opt to create spaces for employees to process together or individually. When you can, let those around you know of your “open door” to discussion. Remember to LISTEN first, think and talk much later.

Communicate early and often

Rumors and innuendo, if allowed to propagate randomly, are extremely harmful. Keep everyone updated on the most recent decisions directly or indirectly affecting staff. This will make employees feel that they are a part of the process. With healthy communication, employees are more apt to stay present and often develop an even deeper bond during a time of change.

Actively listen

Right now, listening is especially challenging because our minds are spinning with all that has happened. That is why we must actively and energetically LISTEN to our colleagues during meetings, discussions, and planning sessions. Put your phone away. Make eye contact. Do not prepare what you will say next while you listen.