



PPP HEALTHCARE

# Manager guide to supporting employees fearful of change

## Change, however large or small, can disrupt any business.

While it's an inevitable part of life, it can trigger feelings of fear or threat if employees think they're losing control and facing an uncertain future.

As a line manager you have a critical part to play in managing change, ensuring your employees are properly informed and engaged so that they may embrace, rather than fear, a new way of working.

Everyone responds to change differently and with varying intensity. Being aware of the signs that an employee is having difficulty processing and accepting what's happening can make it easier to spot when they may need support.

## Five stages of change\*

1

### Denial

The initial shock of learning about the change can lead to a state of denial for your employees, which may be characterised by drowsiness, freezing and/or withdrawal.

2

### Emotional

When employees realise denial cannot continue they may become angry, fearful and frustrated.

3

### Bargaining

Your employees may try to negotiate to regain their sense of control, for example by seeking a mutually acceptable compromise.

4

### Depression

You may notice your employees experience poor concentration or see a drop off in their performance. Their physical activity, eating and sleeping may also be adversely affected.

5

### Acceptance

When your employees come to accept and even buy into the change they may feel re-energised and begin to set new goals and expectations.

\*Kübler-Ross, E., (1969).

**“By the time you come to inform your team about upcoming changes you may well have arrived at the stage of acceptance yourself and formed a positive outlook. But it's important to recognise that your team may need more time to catch up and adjust. To help them achieve this, it's important for you to be clear about what's happening and how it will affect them.”**

Dr Mark Winwood, Director of Psychological Services for AXA PPP healthcare

# Tips to support employees through change

## Be prepared

The way you break the news is critical, so it's important to prepare this well. To help, try putting yourself in your employees' shoes. Think about the setting. Would it be better handled individually or at a group meeting? What questions are your employees likely to ask that you could answer upfront, such as where to go for information and support? Clear, consistent communication will stand you in good stead and help to avoid an information vacuum where speculation or panic can take over.

## Manage uncertainty

Try to manage uncertainty for your team by clearly explaining what the change means and how it will affect people in the organisation as well as customers and other stakeholders. Making this clear for each employee will help them to understand what's coming and respond in a positive way.

## Build trust

In times of change, employees value the counsel of those they trust so it's important to do your best to maintain your team's trust. Make yourself available for confidential discussions so employees can get the information they need in privacy. This can help to maintain their confidence and sense of dignity at what can be a difficult time.

## Advocate resilience

Resilience is a desirable quality for any individual and you can champion this to your team as a matter of course, not just during times of change. For example, by encouraging a healthy work life balance and helping them to live healthy, active lives. Resilient people are generally optimistic, sociable and possess an inner strength that enables them to cope more effectively with life's challenges.

## Encourage consideration

Remind your employees who have accepted and bought into the change that others may be slower to adapt and need more time to catch up. Patience and consideration can be a big help to see this through. Employee Assistance Programmes can be useful, providing confidential, professional support to help employees deal with any pressures they're experiencing.



**“Be positive about meeting the challenge of change. It's an opportunity to show your team how much you value them - and that you understand what they're going through. Good preparation and clear, consistent communication are key and will help to build the trust you need to gain their buy-in to moving forward.”**

Dr Mark Winwood, Director of Psychological Services for AXA PPP healthcare

Find information and inspiration to help keep your business healthy here:  
[axapphealthcare.co.uk/business-health-insurance/business-health-centre](https://axapphealthcare.co.uk/business-health-insurance/business-health-centre)