

Dealing With Constant Change

Living in a world of constant changes requires us to reframe how we think about change.

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LESLIE: We are delighted to have the opportunity to continue writing this column in 2010. Patty and I have received wonderful feedback from our readers through the years. We appreciate your kind words and thank you for reading our column. Due to the positive comments from readers and also because we simply enjoy conversing on HIM and leadership topics, we will continue to write our columns in the same conversational format.

PATTY: We do enjoy our conversations, Leslie! With the non stop change and fast paced work environment of the 2000s, we have come to value our time together that much more and look forward to sharing our conversations with our readers. What should we kick off the 2010 year talking about?

LESLIE: I think it seems appropriate to kick off 2010 with a discussion on dealing with constant change. It's a topic we have touched on when exploring leadership, but we haven't really addressed it head on in our columns.

PATTY: The discussion of systems-based leadership principles in our Hands-On Help columns in September and October 2009 on leading in anxious times, provided some suggestions for dealing with constant change.

LESLIE: Yes, systems-based leadership principles help guide individuals to better manage their natural reactivity to change-a critical factor in successfully facing the challenges that HIM professionals encounter in an unknown but constantly changing future. They provide leaders with the resilience, stability, flexibility and vision to prepare effectively for whatever lies ahead.

PATTY: With continuous change coming at health care organizations in various forms and from many directions-new medical breakthroughs, technology, regulations and cost constraints that all require people to change the way they work, how they communicate, who they work with and even how they relate to all of their constituencies-to make the adaptation and survival of their organizations possible, leaders and staff must be aware of the patterns of behavior in their organizations that either facilitate or compromise successful change.

LESLIE: Exactly! Living in a world of constant changes requires us to reframe how we think about change. We need to see beyond the technical aspects of change and see the broad picture of the organization as an interdependent relationship network that is affected by significant change.

PATTY: If you think about it, keeping up with change isn't really new. What is new is that change has accelerated to the point of being a constant. Constant change is the new norm and challenges us to work more collaboratively and more effectively than ever. On the other hand, Heraclitus the Greek philosopher said

the only constant is change and he said that about 2,500 years ago!

LESLIE: This is where a healthy respect for the organization as a relationship system comes into play, for it is through relationships that complex work and change is successfully accomplished. Focusing our attention on building positive and productive relationships is an important strategy for managing constant change.

PATTY: What about stress? What role does that play in dealing with constant change?

LESLIE: The demand to adapt can be energizing, or it can be stressful. Anxiety is a natural response to stress, and when we are anxious, our performance is affected. We may not think as clearly, it takes more time to get things done and we are more likely to make mistakes.

PATTY: So working to be less stressed and managing anxiety is one important way to deal with nonstop change?

LESLIE: Exactly. Being a non-anxious presence in the work system brings benefits to the organization and to the individual; it can help to calm colleagues and be less vulnerable to absorbing anxiety from others in the work system.

PATTY: Effective change really demands collaboration and I can easily see how being anxious could affect collaboration and how being calm would influence collaboration also.

LESLIE: There are some other basic factors that we don't always consider when managing constant change. It's important for example to get 7 to 8 hours sleep. New scientific research shows that lack of sleep, for even just one night, affects decision making, memory, concentration, mood and your health. People think they are doing fine but the reality, at least the scientific evidence, is that we are not functioning very well on little sleep. Researchers also believe that not getting enough sleep is a top cause for diabetes and obesity. And I recently read that the World Health Organization (WHO) is thinking about labeling chronic sleep deprivation as a carcinogen because they view it as comparable to tobacco and asbestos!

PATTY: Sleep improves memory per the recent research you shared with me. Sleep deprivation adds to feeling overwhelmed, anxious and losing sight of the big picture. Sleep is clearly an important strategy in dealing with nonstop change.

LESLIE: There are a number of very good resources on dealing with constant change. Many of them are very helpful and include change and transition management strategies. I do think in the end, it's not so complicated and doesn't require checklists: work hard at building and maintaining positive relationships, manage your own anxiety, have a calm presence in the work system, get enough sleep to meet each day with energy and enthusiasm, never stop learning and reframe how you think about change.

PATTY: I think these are good resolutions for 2010! And because our column length has changed this year; it's time to wrap it up!

LESLIE: See, we are adaptable to change. We wish our readers all the best on their resolutions for 2010 and a very happy, healthy, productive and prosperous New Year!

Leslie Ann Fox is chief executive officer and Patty Thierry Sheridan is president of Care Communications Inc., a national HIM consulting and staffing company headquartered in Chicago. They invite readers to send their thoughts and opinions on this column to lfox@care-communications.com or ptsheridan@care-communications.com.