



Making the Most of a Transition at Work

It's crisis time. Your company changes the product line, downsizes or merges with another company, or you get a new boss. What can you do to weather the change?

"When it freezes over, ice skate," says Patt Schwab, Ph.D., a professional speaker in Seattle who specializes in workplace change and humor.

During a difficult transition, you may not be able to concentrate on your work, feel immobilized by stress and be frightened about the future.

But don't despair. Dr. Schwab offers the following suggestions to help you float through difficult transitions instead of thrashing around in a sea of confusion.

Analyze

Take time to "analyze what you can or can't do," says Dr. Schwab. "If you can't stop a merger, then figure out what the next step is and live with it. Don't waste time fighting a done deal."

If you're being laid off, analyze your skills, assess your contacts and determine how much time you have between now and your last paycheck.

If your company is involved in a merger, do some research to learn as much as you can about the other company.

Look for opportunities that may arise out of the change. If you get laid off, you get to spend more time with your family, or you could possibly go back to school.

Say farewell

"There's a whole progression of natural feelings you go through during a transition," explains Dr. Schwab. "First you deny something is going to happen, then you resist it, then you explore different scenarios, and finally you accept it and commit to the new change."

Saying good-bye to the past is important to moving forward. You must let go of one side of the pool before you can swim to the other side.

Use humor

"Humor doesn't belittle a serious situation; it lifts you above it and allows you to look at it from a different perspective," says Dr. Schwab. "Humor empowers you. If you can laugh at something, it doesn't feel so overwhelming, and if you can laugh together, it builds stronger relationships."



Here are two ways to use humor during a transition:

- This Day in History. Research the historical events that coincide with your difficult transition. Make a list of several terrible things that happened on this date, and end your list with the troublesome change at your company. Print copies to give your coworkers.
- A Wine and Cheese Party. Get together with coworkers and bellyache together instead of separately. Exaggerate the problem until you start to laugh about it.

Be prepared

A crisis usually doesn't give you time to prepare. But you'll fare best if you live your life like the Boy Scout motto: Be Prepared.

"This means you've kept your training up to date, you haven't extended yourself financially and your relationships are good both in and out of the workplace," say Dr. Schwab.

Even if your company isn't in a crisis mode, preparing yourself for any possibility will help you ease through difficult transitions when they do happen. And in today's workplace, they're more likely to happen than not.

In other words, says Dr. Schwab, "Don't wait till it freezes over to polish your ice skates."

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