

Approaches for Change

“Nothing is permanent but CHANGE” a quote by Heraclitus, accurately sums up the activity profession and the long term care environment. Current literature is filled with words like *“change agent,” “change champion”* and *“culture change.”*

Change is inevitable, it is a continual process of finding better ways to reach our vision. As long-term care communities evolve from using institutional practices to household models and patterns of home, activity professionals are being asked to deliver services in a very different way. Gathering information from residents, writing person centered care plans, using different language, redesigning calendars, developing new team relationships are just a few examples. Change is not always easy. Change is often met with resistance. New ways of doing things can result in avoidance, negativism or fear.

How can we more effectively deal with change, and how can we help others understand and adapt to change?

The first step is to understand individual reactions to change.

Is your first reaction negative or positive? Do you quickly embrace change or resist it? Do you spend time complaining or quickly create alternatives? Do you have thoughts such as the following?

- What will that change mean to me?
- Will it mean I have to work a different schedule?
- Does it mean I have to learn a new system?
- How will that change affect my personal relationships with coworkers?
- Will I get along with my new boss?
- Will I be able to learn the new information?
- Why do we need to change, things are going well.
- We’ve tried that and it won’t work.

Most of the resistance that change brings is caused from fear of the unknown, venturing out of our comfort zone, “the way we’ve always done it,” and being asked to break old habits. Examining your feelings and identifying the specific cause of your resistance helps you deal with change. Discuss these feelings with others. Communicate your concerns and ask for specific information.

The second step is to plan for change.

- Do you wait for others to tell you what to do?
- Do you wait and hope the change will not really happen?
- Do you quickly let go of old patterns of thinking and imagine how you will fit into the new structure?

- Do you actively create plans and a vision for the activity department in the new system?

Effective leaders plan for change, others react to change once it happens. By being proactive, seeing yourself in the new organization or new structure, positive thoughts and enthusiasm will be created.

- Brainstorm alternatives,
- Examine the issue from varied perspectives.
- Be prepared to share your ideas with others.
- Ask for their input.

The third step is to help others understand and deal with change

How do you communicate change to other team members?

Do you involve others in the process?

Do you actively promote shared decision making?

Do you understand the reactions of others on your team to change?

Frequently, how an individual reacts to change is dependent upon how the change is communicated. Strategies to help others in times of change include:

- Clear communication of the reason for the change
- Active listening to the fears and concerns
- Involvement and encouragement of new ideas: awareness exercises
- Shared or group decision making
- Discussion of the positive consequences of change
- Planned opportunities to discuss new behaviors and progress
- Use of "[Learning Circles](#)"

EXAMPLE: At the next meeting to discuss "changes," take a minute for this activity.

Ask for 1-2 volunteers

Have a coat for each and ask them to "put it on"

Observe

Ask them a second time to put the coat on, however, they must change the way they do it.

Observe

Ask the group what they observed.

Ask the participants how it felt.

When we do a task a different way it usually feels awkward, takes longer and requires more concentration. It is difficult to break habits and routine ways to doing things.

"Change your thoughts, and you change your world" Norman Vincent Peale