

How to Stay Productive and Focused at Work During Times of Change

For many people, change brings with it feelings of uncertainty, worry, and anxiety. Changes such as major political or economic shifts in your country, organizational change, or a change in your personal life can disrupt your work life, too. Following is advice to help you stay focused and productive at work during these times.

How change affects us

Change brings with it feelings of uncertainty about the present and the future, which can affect us physically and emotionally. We may experience symptoms of stress that affect our mood, sleep, appetite, or ability to concentrate. We may find ourselves distracted at work or having difficulty completing tasks efficiently. During times of transition, we may feel worried or anxious, as we don't know what life will be like with the changes ahead. All we know is to expect something new and different, which makes it easy to worry about all the "what ifs."

Change can affect individuals and groups, as well as morale, performance, and productivity. Whether the change is personal, general, or work related, try to push distractions aside when you're at work. Also, try to develop a positive mindset so that you're able to carry on with your daily responsibilities and maintain good working relationships. Following are several helpful tactics that may help you stay focused and ease your path in moving forward.

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Tips to help you stay productive and focused at work

Envision your workday. It's easy to spend more time than you planned engaged in talking about the changes ahead. Deciding before the day starts exactly what you want to accomplish will make it easier for you to stay on task.

Aim for smaller tasks. Working on one large project can be overwhelming when you are having trouble focusing or feel stressed. Instead, think small and split up projects into more manageable tasks.

Avoid water cooler conversations about topics that are distracting or upsetting. It's OK to tell people that you'd rather not talk about a topic such as politics, for example, and to politely change the subject.

Stay off social media during the workday. Many organizations have a formal social media policy, including guidelines about use of social networking for personal purposes during the workday or on a work computer. That's just one good reason for staying off personal social

media sites such as Facebook while you're working. Another good reason is that nearly 4 in 10 adults (38 percent) say that political and cultural discussions on social media cause them stress. If social media feeds about national or world events upset or affect you in an unproductive way, set boundaries on how much time you spend online. Duing it out in the comments section of a friend's Facebook post or attacking a particularly vocal tweeter isn't only ineffective at resolving issues -- it's unlikely to leave you feeling any better. It's also very distracting when you're supposed to be working.

It's easy to allow yourself to believe you are doomed or that the future holds a negative outcome. Worrying about things that may never happen can prevent you from seizing opportunities that could make your work and home life better.

Make a year-end career goal. When tension is high or when change makes you and others feel unsettled, having something positive to strive for can help you move forward. Perhaps there's a project you want to complete by the end of the year or a volunteer opportunity you might like to pursue. When people's emotions (including your own) are affecting your work or morale, focusing on your goals can improve your mood and bring a sense of accomplishment.

Be respectful in the workplace. Recognize that people have very different views during times of transition, whether the change is a major political event or a significant change going on at the organization. Some of your co-workers may express optimism, while others may express pessimism. Engaging in heated conversations with co-workers during divisive times could damage valuable work relationships. Remember that the key to good relations is to show respect for others and to know when to politely disengage. Minimize conversations with people who have intense opposing views to your own.

Avoid catastrophizing. It's easy to allow yourself to believe you are doomed or that the future holds a negative outcome. Worrying about things that may never happen can prevent you from seizing opportunities that could make your work and home life better.

Take steps to help reduce feelings of stress during the workday. Try to get outdoors for a walk or to have lunch with a friend. Sign up for an exercise class during your lunch hour. Practice breathing or mindfulness exercises in a quiet space at work. Take a few minutes and do this: breathe in deeply to the count of five, pause, and then breathe out to the count of five, pause again, and repeat. This will calm your nervous system. Also, take advantage of any resources your employer offers to help reduce stress. By taking care of yourself physically and learning relaxation techniques, you will be better prepared to stay resilient during times of change.

Outside of work, consider volunteering to help others or join an organization that works for causes that are meaningful to you. This can bring relief from feelings of helplessness in the face of disruptive change.

Seek support. If you are having difficulty coping or could use support, consider talking with a counselor or therapist. Your employee assistance program (EAP) can connect you with helpful resources. This confidential service is available 24/7 at no cost to you.

The months ahead may bring change on many fronts, but it's possible to stay grounded at home and work. There are ways to keep external events from adversely affecting your wellbeing. The best course is to be positive, avoid uncomfortable discussions, and focus on what you can control.

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