

Career Wise

Author's Advice to Cope With Change at Work

By Sheryl Silver

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Change --- it's been a major mantra of the presidential primary season. Voters seem to want it. Candidates have been promising it.

Yet, despite the clamor for change in the political arena, psychologist and seminar leader Noelle Nelson says most people aren't that eager to embrace change at work.

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Noelle Nelson

"That's particularly true when change is imposed on them rather than freely chosen," said Nelson, whose latest book is **The Power of Appreciation in Business**. "Change is something we don't mind from time to time, a little here, a little there, but preferably when we're in charge of it, not when it's imposed."

"Our resistance to change is something of a survival response," she added. "We feel most confident and comfortable with what we know. That's why even if we long for change we don't always welcome it when presented with it."

Consider technology-related changes at work. They're stressful for most people, said Nelson. "Say you just got used to the upgraded software when suddenly you get an email announcing the software is out --- in favor of a completely new system you have to learn from scratch. These kinds of changes can drive you crazy," said Nelson.

The same can be true of company re-orgs. "Let's say you had a perfectly decent supervisor who's been bumped up the ladder and now you're stuck with Ms. Rules-R-Us," said Nelson.

According to Nelson, people fare better when they have a hand in decisions affecting them at work but she admits they don't usually get to participate in those decisions. That's why she provided the following tips for coping with work changes that are imposed without warning or even apparent logic.

"First," said Nelson, "take a deep breath, step back, and ask yourself: What possible advantage or benefit could there be for me in these changes?"

Then, respond to that question with sentences that begin with the word "Maybe." For example, "Maybe the new system will allow me to get my work done more quickly or more easily."

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Keep in mind, too, added Nelson, you may not know everything you need to know about Ms. Rules-R-Us. Maybe she's a pet lover, like you. And although she's strict about enforcing the company manual, consider that she's new at her job and worried about doing something

wrong that might anger her manager. Or maybe she's afraid you won't respect her if she doesn't enforce the rules.

"Try and put yourself in her shoes," urged Nelson. "And deliberately look for one or two things about her you could possibly like. You may as well. The more cooperative and positive you are, the more likely you are to survive and even thrive with her as your boss."

What if the workplace change imposed on you is the ultimate shocker: a pink slip you never saw coming?

Tough as it may be to do, Nelson urges viewing the situation as part of your professional growth.

"When you're forced into an involuntarily job change, it's normal to get depressed, worried and angry," she said. "But frankly, it's far more productive to embrace the situation and view the need to change employers as an opportunity for personal career growth and development. And be honest. Ask yourself if you were really satisfied with your job or if you were just holding on to it for the paycheck and benefits. A pink slip can often provide people the push they need to pursue jobs and careers they really want."

Even if you enjoyed your last job, losing it doesn't have to undermine your confidence or employability. Whether the company's relocation, reorganization or another circumstance led to your job loss, you can interest other employers in hiring you by accenting your prior work accomplishments during interviews.

"Just make sure you clear your anger and frustration in a safe way before launching your job search," reminded Nelson. "You can use journaling to vent your frustrations or you may want to get some counseling. You might even write an angry letter you never send --- just to get rid of any feelings of disappointment or betrayal you have about your last employer. Such feelings are understandable but totally counterproductive when job hunting."

According to Nelson, "You can't afford to let negative feelings spill out during interviews. Prospective employers need to see your enthusiasm and excitement about future opportunities with their organizations."