

Leverage Organizational Change - Five Ways to Enhance Your Career

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Your career is up to you! That's getting clearer every day. With the tides of change come great opportunities for those who know how to take charge of their careers. Here are smart actions you can take to position yourself well during a time of change.

1. Showcase Your Contributions – Do Your Own PR

Don't expect that anyone notices the value you bring to the organization day-by-day. Package and present your value – to your managers, to your colleagues, to others in the organization. Managers are being driven by an increased cost consciousness and value imperative. Get clear about your accomplishments or “value add” and put them in bottom-line terms.

Ask yourself every day – what have I done to contribute to the bottom line, business strategies, customer satisfaction, or departmental objectives. This means you need to know what these are. Secondly, this kind of consciousness helps you set daily and weekly priorities. You develop business savvy. You start asking more questions when people give you work to do. If not obvious, always ask “*how does this relate to the bigger picture?*” Determine how the task provides value to your organization.

Spend some time thinking about the following questions and ask others how they would answer the questions for you. Do some action research! Find out how others see you. Ask them in an informal manner. Don't make a big deal of your questions but listen to the answers.

- What value do I bring to the organization because of my attitude, personality, prior experiences, skills, customer savvy?
Examples might include:
 - *take initiative* – when a variety of customers made a complaint about not getting tracking numbers for inventory shipments, you developed a system that is now used with all customers;
 - *listen to customers and renegotiate contracts* - renegotiated a contract to give more value to a customer more effectively
- How do you see me contributing to the mission, strategies, departmental objectives?
- Where do you think I could make a greater contribution?

Listen carefully to their answers and see how they fit your perceptions. Look for opportunities to add more value. Think in terms of bottom-line. Then broadcast your answers in a humble, business-oriented manner whenever you have the opportunity. If you can't speak powerfully about your unique value and contribution, who can?

2. Get on Projects that Build Your Visibility and Contribution (Volunteer If Necessary)

During change, training time and training dollars are often limited. Don't let that stop your development. Be on the lookout for projects, assignments or lateral moves that will let you enhance your level of mastery and contribution. Listen for organization needs, customer needs, colleague needs, management needs. Take on those projects – large or small – that will build your competence.

If you're in Finance, this might be budgeting time. See if you can do any legwork, research, build presentations, or develop and build spread sheets required. Tell your manager that you are working on your own development and add more value in "changing times." Let them know you're there to assist.

If you're in Sales, the changes may have impacted new or old business. What new offers can you generate? How might you bundle products or services that are typically unbundled? What other service might you be able to supply a customer? Think like you are the business. (You are!) What can you do to increase sales? Think across territories, regions, product lines, services. Suggest projects that will leverage the changes in business and strategy. Get creative. Think out of the box!

3. Do A Professional Audit – How Do You Stack Up Against Your Peers?

Assess your level of mastery and competencies in your profession. What profession are you in? What level of mastery are you at? – apprentice, individual contributor, coach, master? What projects would let you develop a higher level of mastery? What aspects of that profession have you not yet experienced? Research as if you were running the company and assuring that all employees are up to speed on the latest competencies in their field. Here are several actions you can take to do an audit?

- **Research the professional associations in your field or trade** - Accounting, Pilots Association, Postal Workers, Engineers, Finance, Customer Service, IT, etc.). Go to the various websites. What are the trends and seminars they are touting? What chatrooms do they have? What new thinking shows up? Who are the leaders in the field? See if they have a list of the core competencies for your profession. Most do. What are they? How do you stack up?
- **Participate in a Professional Association or Network.** You don't have to leave your home/city to keep building your career. Mastering a profession or trade is the key building block of a powerful career. ***"Take a job and you'll work for a day. Master a profession or trade and you'll work for a lifetime."*** Hanging out with the "best" in your field, raises your own performance bar.
- **Check out the resources in your own company.** Is there a list of competencies for your profession or trade? If not, look at the courses they provide. These usually indicate the competencies and practices that are important for the future.

- ***Make a list of the key competencies for your profession*** and ask colleagues, past supervisors, current supervisors or managers for feedback. Where are you strong? Where could you make a greater contributions? How do they recommend developing the competency?

4. Provide Energy and Support – Go the Extra Mile.

Organization changes can cause energy drains as well as economic uncertainty for many companies. Managers are over their heads. Help them out. See what's needed and do it. Ask if you can help. Make offers when you see a need. Be an energy source NOT an energy drain.

- ***Team projects.*** Check in often. Check the spirit and energy of your colleagues. Listen to people. Ask how you can help them when they're overly stressed. Offer to critique, review, or just be on the other end of the phone if people get overwhelmed or blocked in any way.
- ***Year end planning.*** Many companies are moving into year end planning and strategic planning for the next year. Look around. Join the teams. Offer to support them – preparing documents, preparing Power Point presentations, running spreadsheets, etc. Some managers just need another set of hands and brains. Be there. Anticipate their needs. Make offers they can't refuse. They'll remember you when times are better.
- ***Be a "go for".*** Get lunch, fun snacks, water, coffee, candy, health food. Notice colleagues demeanor, mood, attitude, etc. Shift it! Bring it up! Provide the positive power surges needed to bolster a team, office unit, office mate, manager or customer. Go out of your way for people NOW and they will go out of their way for you in the FUTURE.

5. Take Care of Your Own Mood and Health — Watch the Image You're Projecting!!

Mergers, acquisitions, downsizing or outsourcing can be disorienting and emotionally upsetting experiences.. They're not always rational — although a rationale can always be provided after the fact. Do what you need to project an energetic, healthy image during these tough times. Managers pick up the subliminal signals of body language, mood, health, etc. ***Blink!*** Take extra good care of your health — physical and psychological — so you don't get sick, need time off, or negatively impact others at the office.

Check into your own feelings, health, mood more frequently. The negative energy vectors in the global environment act like viruses. We don't need a dose of Anthrax to take down our health. We are all more prone to sickness and moodiness these days. Pay attention. Get more exercise. Get more sleep. Watch some of your favorite comedians or comedies. Listen to music. Go outdoors and experience the majesty of water, forests, sky, leaves, mountains. Don't let your own energy drain. Learn to lift your own spirit!

- Stop work 3 times a day and check in with your body. What are you feeling? Where are you tense? Take action to address what you discover. Move. Stretch. Take a break.
- Make a pact with a friend to exercise together — whatever the form. This ups the chance you'll really do it.
- Reflect on your favorite places outdoors. Make a point to retreat there once a week.
- Spend time with those you love — family, friends, or colleagues. Join a book group, have a hobby, go to movies, take up a sport with friends,

This is a critical time in our careers. Character, motivation, attitude, performance, mood, and smarts are more important than ever. If you take the five steps above, you will use the current environment to develop your career and provide value to your company as you're doing it. You'll leverage the winds of change and see a long-term payoff.

About the Author — Caela Farren, Ph.D., is President of MasteryWorks Inc. in McLean, VA. She has been a consultant, entrepreneur, and educator for over 30 years, Caela has worked with hundreds of thousands of people worldwide to get them on their *mastery path*. Caela's practice and company builds strong links between changing trends in industries, changing strategies of organizations and the talents and aspirations of individuals. People who work with her company discover their passion, their mastery path, and bring renewed contribution and high performance to their organizations.

Caela is known internationally for her expertise in developing talent management products and services. Her solutions are user-friendly systems that serve the needs of both organizations and individuals. She is frequently quoted in the media regarding her thoughts and advice on changing careers and work patterns in the nation. Hundreds of organizations have implemented talent management solutions from MasteryWorks, Inc. — consulting, workshops, assessment instruments and web-based talent management portals.