

# Leader Tips

## Leading through the emotions of uncertainty and change

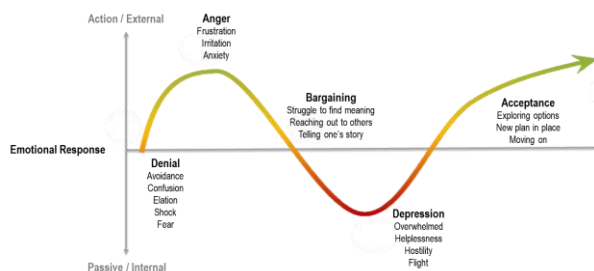
Change is inevitable. Successfully working through times of uncertainty and change is a choice.

Teams thrive during periods where the strategy and direction are both clear and predictable. Individuals are at their best when they have a sense of control over the outcome. But such clarity is often not the case. Our teams regularly find themselves in positions where clarity and control is replaced with uncertainty and stress. This past year has been an unusual period of change and uncertainty. If there is anything we can be sure of is that change is always around the corner.

Each employee will have a unique response to change and uncertainty. Some may thrive during chaotic period. Others may struggle. Regardless, most will have an emotional reaction to change that, left unmanaged, can get in the way of team success.

As leaders, it is important to be aware of the emotions of change. Our goal is to recognize when employee behavior and performance might be affected and help employees resolve their concerns before they have an impact at home or work. Some of the common responses to uncertain and change include:

- Denial and avoidance of the change
- Anger, frustration or anxiety
- Confusion or a desire to control or manipulate the change
- Feeling burned out or overwhelmed
- Eventually accepting and adjusting to the change



### Signs of a Struggling Employees

When employees lives at work or home are destabilized during periods of significant change and uncertainty, leaders may see signs that they are in need of additional support. Such signs may involve:

- Hearing about employees life stress outside of work, such as relationship problems, financial or legal difficulties, chronic health problems, or signs of drug or alcohol abuse.
- Changes in appearance or demeanor at work. Appearing confused, anxious, depressed or irritable.
- Subtle changes with employees working remotely, such as changes in tone of emails or phone calls, less communicative, reluctance to use web cameras, offline more or slow to respond, decreased work output, being offline more due to illness.
- Loss of motivation. Reduced work quality or quantity. Attendance problems. Coming in late or leaving early.
- Relationship problems with team members. Becoming socially withdrawn.
- Less accepting of feedback and coaching.

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### Supporting employees as they move through the change

Throughout the change process, leaders should address employee reactions and concerns, and refocus attention on the reasons for change and benefits that will result.

#### Inform

- Review the business case for change
- Emphasize that change will happen
- Allow time for change to sink in

#### Support

- Acknowledge the legitimacy of the emotional reactions
- Keep employees focused on the reasons behind the change
- Keep problem solving focused on the goals
- Provide a series of specific next steps and follow-up frequently
- Reinforce positive actions that individuals can take

#### Commit

- Continue to provide a series of specific next steps and follow-up frequently
- Continue to reinforce positive actions the individual can take
- Provide recognition for his/her efforts
- Use committed employees as coaches or mentors for others

### Potential Leader responses at each stage of the change.

- **Denial and Immobilization:** Keep repeating the communication. Change the words and tone. Divide change into smaller parts and focus on first steps. Avoid or resolve confusion.
- **Emotion, anger, worry:** Legitimize the emotions. Emotions are a natural reaction to is perceived as loss of control. Don't take it personally. Be patient. Allow the emotion, but maintain performance and behavior standards.
- **Bargaining:** Only bargain those parts of the changes or the implementation that are negotiable. Make it clear what is negotiable and what will not change.
- **Depression and burnout:** Provide support and show empathy. Champion good health and self-care. Consult with and refer employees to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- **Exploration:** Acknowledge progress. Build confidence and a sense of control. Empower ownership of the change.
- **Acceptance:** Celebrate success. Recognize team effort. Be clear in direction and strategy.

For confidential support, free of charge, contact Caterpillar's **Employee Assistance Program (EAP):**

📞 1-309-820-3604

🌐 [EAP.cat.com](http://EAP.cat.com)

📞 1-866-228-0565

🌐 [CaterpillarEAP.com](http://CaterpillarEAP.com)

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