



SkillSharpener Web Extra

Dealing positively with negative change

Change is a fact of life for customer service representatives. Products and services change. New customer service channels like web chat and social media emerge. Technologies change, and reps have to learn how to use new tools. Management regularly issues notices about changes in policies and procedures. Customers change, and the issues that they face change, as well.

"Change is often so constant that a lot of times reps find themselves playing catch-up," says Barbara Burke, a customer service trainer and author of *The Napkin, the Melon & the Monkey* and *The Monkey, the Moon & Maybe*.

The reality of change, and the difficulty of keeping up isn't going to go away. "We may wistfully think back to when things were more quiet and stable," Burke says, "but in fact, the rate of change in today's workplace is actually increasing." But, she adds, there are some things you can do to keep up with the pace and to adapt more readily to the changes going on in your world, rather than becoming a casualty of those changes.

Whether it's a change at work or a change in your personal life, you have the option of choosing your response, says Burke. Try one of these four options:

- **Stop, then go.** If your initial reaction is "no way," stop a minute to consider the possibility that the idea just might work.
- **Keep yourself moving.** Telling yourself, "This will never work," or "Why can't we leave things the way they are?" will keep you stuck. Instead, think about how you can contribute.
- **Join the movement.** Once you see that a change is inevitable, get on board or get out of the way.

- **Control your reactions.** Remember, "It's not what happens to you in work or life that counts, it's what you do with what happens."

Offer options along with objections

If you feel that you have legitimate objections to a potential change, then of course you should voice those concerns and objections to your manager. "But it's not enough to just throw up an objection and to say you don't like something," Burke says. "It's much better for everyone, when you do have an issue with a proposed change, and you really do think it is a bad move and might have a negative impact on service quality, that you voice your concern — but you do it in a constructive way."

In other words, don't just bring up your opposition. Bring along some options — alternative changes that you think might work better and have a more positive effect on the customer than the change that has been proposed.

Sometimes change is going to happen even over our objections and despite the alternative solutions we offer, and the best thing for reps to do then is to accept it. "Ask yourself, 'What is the most skillful reaction that I can have to this change?'" says Burke. "And whatever you do, don't allow yourself to feel like a victim. That's a sure recipe for unhappiness."





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It's healthier to look at changes at work — and changes in other parts of your life — as things that are largely beyond your control. "What you can control about changes going on around you, however, is how you react to them," Burke says. "If you can, look at things and say, 'OK, I really

don't like this new credit policy, and I think it is a dumb idea, but it is going to happen whether I like it or not. I have made my objections clear, and now I am going to have to choose my reaction. And the smart thing to do is to help to make it work." ■



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