

Adaptability: An Essential Tool for Managers

In today's dynamic workforce change is no longer the exception—it's the rule. Managers with high adaptability respond well to unforeseen changes. In fact, many of them thrive on change.

Adaptability in action

When the server crashed at Jim's company, three panic stricken managers stormed his office with pronouncements of doom and gloom. Remarkably, Jim remained calm and collected. He quickly assessed the problem and took the lead in the process of damage control and restoring calm. His colleagues were amazed at how he kept his head about him when everyone else was losing their grip.

When layoffs were suddenly announced at the bank, Krista knew it was going to mean a lot more work for her department. Instead of recoiling into "survival" mode, she began to see the opportunities to improve service. Suddenly she was energized and began the process of reorganizing her teams.

How do some managers keep their wits and focus, while others seem to downshift in the face of change? One explanation is that some managers are very adaptable to change.

In the book *Now Discover Your Strengths* management experts Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton describe adaptors as those who manage to stay flexible and productive when the demands of the job are pulling them in many different directions at the same time.

Notable characteristics of highly adaptable managers

- Highly adaptable managers react and respond exceptionally well to unforeseen change, often energized by it
- Adaptable managers often are excellent mentors for new employees because they can easily accommodate the schedule changes necessary to guide or help orient another into a new position
- Adaptive managers do best on short-term projects that require their immediate, focused attention
- When a new process or procedure is implemented these managers are great at encouraging others
- When an employee is out for an extended period, adaptive managers find creative ways to get the job done with little cost to the bottom line or department morale

Becoming more adaptive.

What if adaptability is not one of your management strengths? Don't worry. Here are some recommendations to help you become more adaptive and effective:

- Get a little better at it. If planning, not adapting, is your strength, make contingency plans for times when things go awry. In other words, use your strengths to overcome this weakness.
- Create a support system that includes key associates you can count on when things are changing too fast for your comfort level
- Find the best adapters on your team and ask for their input in times of change. Some of your employees are very adaptable and would love to be more involved in the change process. This is truly a win-win scenario.
- Find a partner whose strengths match your weakness and vice versa. Mentor each other and confide about issues. The relationship will be very rewarding and valuable to your career.
- Remember that it is never too late to learn something new. All it takes is desire.

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