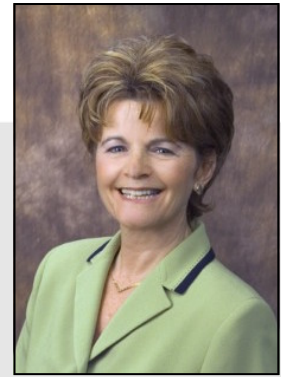


## ask the expert

# How can my nonprofit staff and board better cope with the realities of change?

Linda Seiden, President, Evoking Excellence Coaching



**Question.** My nonprofit is going through a time of growth and transition, but staff and board seem to be resistant to the positive changes. How can I help my staff and board become less fearful and more accepting?

**Answer.** Change is an inevitable part of an organization's life cycle. Understanding why change is difficult or fear-inspiring helps us deal with change, on a personal level and on an organizational level. Let's first look at the fear factor of change:

1. Change involves some level of risk.
2. The outcome of change is unpredictable. Fear of the unknown is powerful.
3. Change may not be initiated by the people who will be directly impacted by it.
4. People will often fail to separate the importance of change on an organizational level with the fear of change on a personal level.
5. The organizational change may require you to make some personal changes (educational, emotional or other).

Start by being honest with yourself about the changes in your nonprofit. Do you have any fears or anxieties? If so, is the fear of this change based on protecting your job or volunteer role within your organization, or is it based on protecting the organization itself? Most often, the fear is aligned with protecting oneself. One of the most common questions is "How will my role or perceived role within the organization change?" Expect that your staff and board will be asking this question themselves. It has been said that people don't resist change, they resist being changed. There are some excellent ways to put yourself and others at ease about

change:

1. Convey the message that everything—including change—is subject to change. If things don't work out as expected, modifications can be made. Change is a process, not an event.
2. Communicate with everyone about the change as it is unfolding. If you don't know the answer yet, be honest, but don't leave your people in the dark.
3. Ask for feedback during the transition, not after. Including staff and board in the process is critical.
4. Stress that nothing about the change is personal; change is for the good of the organization.
5. Accept that change includes a grieving process; your staff and board may experience a feeling of loss. Know it will pass shortly if acknowledged and embraced.

*"Change is hard because people overestimate the value of what they have—and underestimate the value of what they may gain by giving that up."*

— James Belasco and  
Ralph Stayer  
*Flight of the Buffalo*

Implementing these behaviors will help you, your staff and your board see that change does not have to be difficult or confusing. Change is essential to fostering creativity and innovation in your organization; in fact, it can make the difference between success and failure of your nonprofit over time. Recognizing change as this positive and necessary force will help everyone create new possibilities. When it comes right down to it, change can represent a new form of competitive advantage for your organization as well as the individuals supporting it.

*Linda Seiden is the president of Evoking Excellence Coaching. A business and life coach with over 25 years of experience in the human development arena, Seiden helps individuals and organizations overcome barriers to success and achieve their highest potential. Contact Evoking Excellence Coaching at 941.355.7665.*

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