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How to Prepare a Team for Change

Some people like change, some people hate it, and some people even love it. For most employees, it's a mixed bag. But by staying connected to their workforces, agency leaders can help all their employees embrace a new organizational direction.

At a recent GovLoop training, two change management experts from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) offered their thoughts about change preparation, which inspired the following worksheet, as well as a recap blog post.

Check in With Yourself

A manager needs to be a steward and supporter for the change. That's tough if you haven't had a chance to process the change yourself.

"As you're presenting it to your team, they're going to look for you to be that guiding voice," said Jennifer R. Franks, Director of GAO's Information Technology and Cybersecurity team.

→ **What is positive about desired change or changes at your agency?**

→ **What are you feeling cautious about?**

→ **What do you think will be the aspects requiring extra vigilance and sensitivity?**

Involve the Employee Perspectives

Change will be unsuccessful if you don't consider the thoughts and ideas of your many staff members. "As a new manager, it's important to be the voice between the senior leadership and the staff that we lead," said Taka Ariga, Chief Data Scientist and Director of GAO's Innovation Lab.

Think about your staff and their interactions regarding the change:

→ **What have you communicated with staff about the change?**

→ **What kind of feedback have you received from them?**

→ **How did management respond after you shared your employees' feedback?**

→ **Will the process be modified based on recent staff feedback?**

→ **What else do you need to share with your staff?**

Meet Them Halfway

Ariga encouraged managers to find a halfway point for learning new technology, to make it less overwhelming for employees.

Task or adjustment	Halfway point	End point
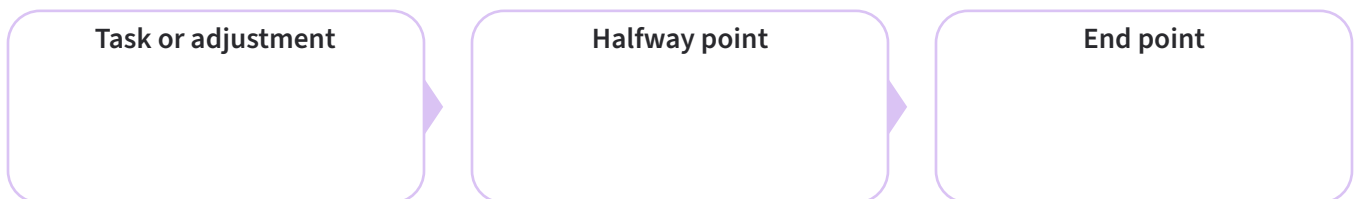
Increase Transparency

Managers should aim to have scheduled, transparent conversations with staff that address how the changes will impact their daily, weekly, and monthly business operations, and even their personal development and personal lives.

"I think it's helpful that your staff know that you're not trying to do the 'gotcha' or catch them off guard," said Franks. "Because at the end of the day, we all have work-life balance that we're also juggling."

→ **In keeping communication transparent with your staff, what are the next set of things they need to know that maybe they don't?**

Adapt Short-Term to Long-Term

Naturally, change doesn't occur at one specific time, and it may not be fully planned out when it begins. But, Ariga notes, "the credibility of change is in those longer-term directions."

In your change process, what is working in the short-term that needs to shift for the long-term plan? Consider your staff's perspective as you design these future goal posts.

Right now, we are:	Over the next six months, we need to begin:
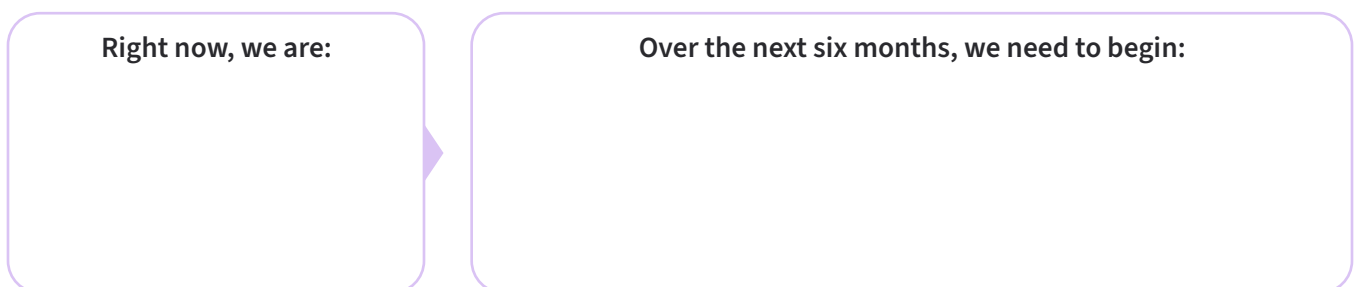
Change is never easy, but with some careful thought and lots of communication, you and your team will make it through intact — and come out better than ever!

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