

Leader- and Team-Focused Strategies for Change During Transitions

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The Challenge

The quality of a leader's response to change contributes substantially to the stability and longevity of an organization. Conversely, we know that average program director (PD) tenure, across all graduate medical education (GME) specialties, with commensurate PD knowledge and skills turnover, is between 4 and 7 years.¹ Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) requirements are also changing regularly. As a GME leader, how can you approach daily work while remaining ready to encounter a wide spectrum of changes and transitions?

What Is Known

Prepared leaders have encountered change, expected or unexpected, and thrive in the face of it.² We categorize change into 4 distinct areas: scheduled (expected) and unscheduled (unexpected), which can both occur institutionally (internal) or extra-institutionally (external) (TABLE). Unexpected and external changes are likely to be more challenging for GME leaders, in navigating and leading their teams through these transitions.

Rather than viewing these changes as diametrically opposed problems to solve (eg, stability versus change),

RIP OUT ACTION ITEMS

1. Get comfortable with change, maintain your core values, and make it your practice to challenge orthodoxy.
2. Engage your team in the change process by seeking their input and feedback to increase buy-in and identify potential issues.
3. Recognize and celebrate progress early and regularly.

reframe them as a “delicate polarity to manage.”³ As a GME leader, you must embrace the change by providing energy to both polarities, to show stability and consistency. This provides GME learners, faculty, and others with a sense of safety and normalcy in their day-to-day lives, while positioning them to accept change without fear. If the polarity is balanced correctly, change in a GME community should represent a “both/and” phenomenon rather than an “either/or” situation.² For example, accreditation deadlines might approach as we handle unexpected external changes (eg, funding, government regulations) that are occurring in parallel. Both are important to manage and are inextricably linked. Both/and strategies can help make the process smoother and more effective. These strategies must highlight promoting stability while embracing change.⁴

TABLE
Examples of Change

	Internal	External
Expected	Orderly change of PDs, DIO, faculty	ACGME requirements (Common Program, Specialty Specific, Institutional)
	Orderly change of trainees	ACGME site visit
	Orderly change of C-suite	New class of trainees
	Planned mergers or buyouts	GME expansion by local competitor
Unexpected	Death of a trainee, faculty member	Unscheduled ACGME site visit; resident complaint filed
	Human resources issue	Political change (eg, federal/state)
	Legal issue (eg, trainee or faculty issue)	Legal issue (eg, patient lawsuit)
	Sudden C-suite change	Public health emergency; natural disaster
	Sudden mergers or buyouts	Decrease in GME reimbursement

Abbreviations: PD, program director; DIO, designated institutional official; ACGME, Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education; GME, graduate medical education.

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How You Can Start TODAY

Leader-Focused Strategies		Shift Your Thoughts on Change	- Get comfortable with change and make it your practice to challenge orthodoxy. - Maintain your core values but be open to change so that you can be a role model to those you lead.
		Lead by Example	- Demonstrate the behaviors and attitudes you want to see in those you lead and in your leaders. - Your actions can inspire and motivate others to react positively and appropriately to change, and to embrace change.
		Maintain a Positive Attitude	- As a leader your attitude can significantly influence the outlook of others. - Stay positive and focused on the benefits of the change.
		Be Flexible and Adaptable	- Be prepared to adjust your plans as needed. - Change often comes with unexpected challenges, so being adaptable is crucial.
		Listen Actively	Actively listen to those you lead and other leaders to ensure you are keeping up to date with issues and concerns.
Team-Focused Strategies		Involve Your Team	- Engage your team in the change process by seeking their input and feedback. - Increase team member buy-in and identify potential issues early, which allows time for mitigation before crises occur.
		Communicate Clearly and Frequently	- Keep your team informed about upcoming changes and potential challenges, the reasons behind them, and how they will affect everyone. - Transparency in communication builds trust and reduces uncertainty during times of change.
		Provide Support and Resources	- Ensure those you lead have the necessary tools, training, and support to adapt to the changes. - This might include additional training sessions, access to innovative technology, or emotional support.

What You Can Do LONG TERM

Team-Focused Strategies ⁴		Celebrate Small Wins	- Mental stress can be associated with change. - Recognizing and celebrating small wins, no matter how small, boosts morale and keeps those you lead motivated.
		Monitor and Evaluate	- Continuously assess the impact of changes and be open to making rapid adjustments as needed. - Regular team check-ins can help to ensure that changes are on track and address any issues promptly.
		Empower Your Team	- Foster an environment of trust where team members feel confident to take initiative and make decisions. - Avoid micromanagement and show you believe in your team's abilities, which will encourage growth and innovation.

References and Resources for Further Reading

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