

## Managing life's challenges

Spending more time at work than with family can alter the lens with which we view our lives and so we can feel overwhelmed by our days

I don't know about your world but life seems to become busier each year! I recall a time when I felt it was term 1 that was full on; now that speed and urgency seems to fill the year. We appear to bounce from one fire to the next and one timeline to another without coming up for breath. On top of this, we have personal lives that come with their own demands. Juggling home life and the workplace can push the best of us at times.

*So how should we approach our lives to feel in control?*

*What can we do to improve our activities to obtain some relief?*

Within schools and business there are increasing pressures and expectations consuming our days. We need to learn how to work smarter not harder. The value of self-care is another factor we need to bring into the equation to make sustainable and meaningful change. Spending more time at work than with family can alter the lens with which we view our lives and so we can feel overwhelmed by our days.

### So where do we start first?

A lot of the challenge in the workplace is around managing multiple and conflicting priorities and personalities. As a leader, you are a change agent within your school. You set the tone and culture as to how difficulty and the unknown are approached. Knowing yourself and your reaction to stress and change can help to set a tone by which you approach your daily tasks, interactions and leadership responsibilities.

Reflecting on our transition from school to studies and studies to the workforce, as much as between roles or stages of our lives, we notice patterns of response. Some people approach changes with optimism and energy, excited by what will come next. Some will resist the change and avoid what is needed in the hope it will disappear. Others will work between processing, questioning, researching and assessing for what lies ahead. It is worth taking time to consider:

1 How you have approached change in the past



### Also published by ACEL

- **e-Shortcuts** – Wisdom for successful school leadership and management
- **e-Teaching** – Management strategies for the classroom
- **e-Technology** – Technology in the classroom
- **e-Early Learning** – Thinking on early learning

---

Dealing with change and issues on a continual basis requires energy and a motivation that is boundless

---



- 2 What emotions you experienced
- 3 What behaviours you exhibited with others
- 4 What the result of these actions and feelings was
- 5 What you could do differently to improve in the future.

Once you have reflected on these concepts, you are in a great place to assess modifications, continuation or adaptation of your:

- Language
- Behaviour
- Emotions.

Dealing with change and issues on a continual basis requires energy and a motivation that is boundless. You need to find fuel when tired and present as positive when you are frustrated or annoyed. When dealing with issues yourself or managing those who are, there are several key contributors to making meaningful improvements in your own self-growth around managing transformation. Consider the following.

#### Circle of influence

Break down the issues or areas frustrating you or creating negative reactions. Assess whether they are elements you can control or whether they are aspects outside of your area of influence. If you can control them, make changes, alter the situation, do! If it is not in your control then you have little choice but to accept or manage it. Remove the energy from these negative emotions by reflecting on what is within your circle of influence and those aspects that are not. With colleagues feeling consumed,

have them write down what is bothering them, then circle or highlight those areas they can have an impact on. Support them in focusing on these for next steps to respond in a constructive manner to the situation at hand.

#### Acceptance

For worries and frustrations outside your control, look to accept them as much as possible. Take note of whether they are things worth consideration or whether they are adding to your busy mind without any value. Concern for weather, world events or possible issues can be a lot of stress with no real value. In accepting matters, we acknowledge what they are and seek to move our thoughts from them rather than continuing to dwell on or absorb our thoughts around them. If they are impacting on us and require some action, for example misaligned peers or colleagues, consider how to manage around them or in a way that improves your engagement with them.

#### Small steps

*“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” Lao Tzu*

Remember that it is small steps that make sustainable change or create relief. Working with a peer or list, focus on what needs to be achieved. If feeling overwhelmed or leading others who do, work together to break down the steps. Set priorities from these actions and timelines that can be attained without feeling more pressure. Identify three clear small steps that are most essential and action them. Once complete, identify the next three and so on.

#### Clear actions

Create clarity about what is needed; ensure you think about who needs to be involved or what is required to implement your next steps. Make sure the actions are purposeful and relevant to the overall need and school. As a leader, it is essential you have a succinct message other people can understand, connect with and follow. If you are unclear of your expectations or unable to articulate them, how can others know what you wish to attain?

#### Consider physical impacts

Physical exhaustion and poor health can create an impact on our mental state, often leading to physical impacts. Consider:

- Where you hold your tension
- How this impacts on your rest or health
- Whether you choose different foods or avoid eating
- Do you have disruptive sleep?
- Are you in regular pain?

Once you can identify the physical impact of your stress, focus on how you relax, concentrate or release the tension. Find a way of discharging this angst in a way that suits you and your style. Positive methods of





---

In breaking down situations and our natural response to issues, we are well positioned to lead others through their own development

---

stress and tension release include:

- Walking or running
- Listening to music or appealing sounds, e.g. water
- Finding quiet space
- Getting outdoors
- Visual stimulus, e.g. photos
- Fidget games or squishy balls
- Talking with someone trusted.

#### **Practise control**

Once you determine to release a thought, block a negative emotion or commit to an activity, ensure you use self-control to follow through. If your mind wanders or you feel concern rising, refocus to allow the moment to pass. Control your thoughts, mirror this with your words and those you surround yourself with. If you have a tendency to avoid change and seek to embrace it, surround yourself with those who are excited by the potential and revolution ahead.

#### **Active reflection**

As you reach outcomes or respond to emotions, reflect on what is or isn't working for you and those you lead. Create a toolkit of methods of responding to stress you can go to as needed or share with others. Seek to improve your own skills through candid consideration of:

- How you reacted
- What your impact on others was
- How quickly you were able to manage thoughts and actions
- When you were able to positively control your thoughts
- Positive or negative impacts you had on others
- What you would change in future
- What your next step will be

#### **Practise gratitude**

A lot of leaders are so busy rushing to the next emergency they forget to be grateful for those around them, their own development, the life outside of work that supports them, friends and colleagues that improve others' approach to change. Research supports that recognition is consistently underutilised by organisations. In schools, so much of our focus is on recognising and appreciating student achievements we can forget to be grateful to staff. Share this appreciation with specific and meaningful praise in a manner in which others will feel comfortable and valued.

In breaking down situations and our natural response to issues, we are well positioned to lead others through their own development. Negatively charged leaders do not facilitate an environment where others will seek out support, feel they can add or question, nor obtain a sense of belonging. Your development as a leader is to gain comfort in discomfort, and so to build skills to respond to uncertainty with optimism and to engage others in the process.

If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude.

**Maya Angelou**

Change your thoughts and you change your world.

**Norman Vincent Peale**

Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings.

**William Arthur Ward**