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Coping with Changes in Job Descriptions: A Survival Guide

By [Melissa Mallon](#)

While those of us lucky enough to have jobs might feel guilty complaining about workplace stress, employees throughout the nation face the strain of changing job descriptions. Restructuring of employee organization, reduction in work hours or even downsizing may shift the balance in an organization. My library, which is a small organization to begin with, lost one of our full-time staff members to a career change. Budget issues have not allowed for a replacement and, as a result, each librarian and staff member has seen a change to his or her job description. Regardless of the reasons for change, all of the aforementioned issues can cause an undue amount of work-related stress and insecurity. Fortunately, a variety of coping methods are available to library workers as they face unexpected (and even expected) changes to their daily routines. Utilize the tips below to ease stress, strengthen your support network and grow into your new professional role(s).

Make New Connections and Strengthen the Old Ones

One of the most important things to remember is that you are not alone. The chances are good that your co-workers are also experiencing modifications to their job duties. You can use this opportunity to meet with your colleagues and discuss the realities of your new role. If job responsibilities have been reassigned among existing employees, call on the experience and assistance of the person who previously held your new position. During our transition, my colleagues and I have found comfort in the fact that we can turn to one another for suggestions on how certain situations should be handled. If the assignment of new duties is due to a layoff, you can still seek advice from others in a similar position. Colleagues at other institutions, relevant electronic mailing lists and library associations all offer opportunities for solidarity and support.

Divide New Responsibilities into Manageable Tasks

Once the changes go into effect, focus on the day-to-day realities of your new job description. To avoid feeling overwhelmed, tackle one aspect of your role at a time. Due to the cut-backs in my library, all librarians have begun working shifts at the circulation desk. In order to ease into my new role, I began by studying each section the policy manual separately and shadowing a more experienced staff member. After a few weeks of this, I felt much more comfortable on my own. Or perhaps you have been assigned to work shifts on the

reference desk. Gradually become familiar with the collection: start with ready reference materials such as atlases and dictionaries, and then move on to subject-related encyclopedias and directories. After several weeks, you will feel more comfortable with the reference collection and better prepared to fulfill the requirements of your new role.

Put It in Perspective

One of the changes to my job description is that I will be taking on the role of library “computer” liaison. While I feel comfortable with technology and have a working-knowledge of computers, this is definitely not my forte. When I found myself feeling distressed and worried about this new role, I took a moment to put it into perspective. Realistically, this job will only take up about five percent (or less) of my work time, which means I should not let it affect my life beyond the doors of my library. When I readjusted my perspective, the knot in my stomach began to dissolve.

Embrace Professional Challenges

Rather than viewing the new job duties negatively, look at them as a challenge. Identify opportunities for success within your new position and look for ways to enhance the job description to fit your strengths. By investing your time and commitment to the role and your library, you will feel more motivation to conquer your fear of change. Additionally, committing to your new duties will allow you to diversify your skill set and demonstrate your flexibility to current and future employers. These challenges might take your career in a new, exciting direction.

Reevaluate Personal Priorities

Finally, analyze what is important in your life.¹ This technique is crucial to surviving work-related changes of any kind. Examine the major components of your life and decide where your job, and specifically your new duties, fit in. Chances are that when you factor in family, friends and hobbies, your daunting new job description will seem rather insignificant and much less overwhelming. Some people might, however, find that stress regarding their new role is overshadowing other obligations in an unhealthy way. If this is the case, it may be time to step back and reorganize your priorities. Consider taking up a new hobby or setting aside time every week to spend with friends or family. Relaxation techniques, such as yoga or meditation, can help alleviate stress and negativity. Occasionally, professional assistance is needed to overcome work-related stress. Many institutions offer free counseling services for their employees.

While a change in job description or daily routine can cause feelings of anxiety and insecurity, the outcome does not have to be a negative one. Take it from someone who has recently undergone a change to her work routine; by employing the coping techniques mentioned above, you too can handle the changes in your job description gracefully while demonstrating your flexibility and commitment to your work environment.

Reference

1. Kimbrough-Robinson, Carla, “Change happens: Deal with it,” *The Quill*, 96.2 (March 2008): 35. <http://www.galegroup.com>.

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