

# FOCUSED AND FLEXIBLE: MANAGING AMID UNCERTAINTY

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Thank you all for joining us today for Focused and Flexible: Managing Amid Uncertainty. I'd like to now introduce our presenter, Jennifer Tobey:

Jennifer Tobey is a licensed professional counselor in the state of Colorado and an employee assistance specialist serving multiple federal agencies. She has over a decade of clinical experience counseling individuals, families, groups, and the military. Currently, Ms. Tobey provides solution-focused interventions for numerous issues including addictions, personal and occupational challenges along meeting with supervisors for consultation and has delivered critical incident response services. We are excited to have her with us today to discuss managing uncertainty in the workplace. And with that, I'll turn it over to Jen to begin the presentation.

Thank you, Tammy.

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Today we are going to speak about various aspects of how to manage amid change in the workplace. Various events such as changes in administration and legislative policy are external events that often result in internal agency changes. These changes are a natural part of every agency, but can cause angst and confusion for you and your staff. Today, we will discuss how to stay focused and flexible and manage employees as business flows and workloads change.

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We will discuss and review the phases of transition that all people experience including common reactions. We will discuss the supervisor's role in helping employees adapt to change. We will also explore strategies for managing staff and offer guidance on ways to improve outcomes and overcome resistance. Additionally, we will provide and discuss self-care techniques.

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According to the Cambridge dictionary, organizational change is defined as a process in which a company or organization changes its working methods or aims. For example, in order to develop and deal with new situation or markets. Half of American workers report experiencing change in the workplace every year, and in light of this past year and recent events, this number has increased. There are numerous types of planned and unplanned changes that may affect you and your agency. These include contract awards or modifications, change in administration, budget cuts, new agency or department leadership, changes in laws or regulations, any kind of natural disasters, and, of course implementation of new software or technology. Any kind of workplace change, how an organization treats their workers during a transition determines how successful the change and the agency will be. Just as everyone must go through a process of transition, the agency on a whole must adapt.

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It is very important to note that for this presentation today, change is considered an external event, so a change in policy or a pandemic, and the actual transition is the inner psychological process, such as confusion, fear, sadness, et cetera, that most individuals experience in the light of a change.

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There are three phases of transition as you can see here. And truly, our people in the workplace are the most valuable resource when it comes to any kind of agency change. However, if this is not properly managed, they can also be the number one obstacle and threat to the process.

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This is often because feelings of uncertainty and loss can incite other strong emotions in people such as anger or defiance. It is therefore vital that you as a supervisor understand and even anticipate employees' responses to change. Understanding these three phases can help you supervisor and better manage the obstacles that arise.

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William Bridges who was an author and speaker, has provided an outline through his research and his finding that many employees and agencies move through. The first one you can see here is called endings and it is mostly about fear and loss. And it truly involves recognizing that something has come to an end. This could be a specific policy, or even a colleague. It is an end to the way things used to be. This specific phase people not only see the loss, but also start to mourn the loss. In phase two, people remain psychologically attached to the old way of doing things. This phase is called the neutral zone because it is truly the time between endings and beginnings that the old way of doing things is gone, yet, the new way isn't yet in full affect. And being in a state of limbo can be extremely confusing and distressing for people. It is kind of like they are trying to look backward and forward at the same time from knowing you know how they once fit into their role and the agency to, you know, not quite being sure what their role is.

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And phase three, people tend to move toward a new identity slowly returning to a more stable state. And in this phase, people accept or internalize the new ways of doing things and accept it as a part of their life and their job and are able to establish new roles. By understanding these stages of change and transition, you can start to read the motivation for successful change in your agency.

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Research has shown that people tend to, you know, change and experience transition in predictable manners. Some of these common responses to change include increase in internal competition, emotional outbursts, job searching at work, resentment, increase in questions, et cetera. All of these can lead to more client satisfaction and errors in the workplace and can affect you as a supervisor, it can affect your team and the agency as a whole.

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As we have just discussed, changes are a regular occurrence in every agency, but consistently present supervisors with challenges. Understanding how employees react internally to these changes can assist in overcoming, you know, these emotions that could impede progress.

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I am going to invite you now to respond to our first polling question. Bring to mind a time during your professional career when you were faced with a workplace change. I invite you to recall

your personal experience during the change in the transition process. Think about how you felt, what did you see happening around you? And what kind of affects did it have on you, and on other employees? Tammy, if you could go ahead and bring up the poll.

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Thank you. And I will give you all --

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It is open now.

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Yes, we have about 45 seconds left, so if you haven't responded yet, if you could please go ahead and respond to the poll question right now, that would be great.

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Looks like we have a lot of responses coming in. Thank you so so much.

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21 seconds or so if you have not replied yet.

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All right about 8 seconds left now.

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Okay. Just one second. Let me get those poll results up. Okay.

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Okay. So looking at some of the answers here, it looks like a lot of supervisors have seen a change in focus and motivation which is, of course, very common. I think the second most common was diminished morale, and then it looks like an increase in skepticism and rumors was also pretty big, as well.

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Decrease in communication, as well. And so it is -- it is very common for a lot of these things to happen in the workplace and even as supervisors, it is we're all going to have our own internal reactions to changes, as well.

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So it is important to be aware of these. Thanks, Tammy.

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okay. I will continue. So it is part of the supervisor's job to bring order. To chaos, calm employees' concerns, give them confidence and motivate them to work toward a successful outcome. The first step is to think about the way you frame and talk about change. Sometimes change is a reactive strategy that takes place when something isn't working well. In other situations, changes occur due to either, you know, agency expansion or innovation. Either way, a supervisor has to believe in and trust in the change themselves prior to engaging employees.

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in all phases of change and transition, there is loss. It is very important to truly be aware of what your employees are feeling around the loss such as specific responsibility, resources or even autonomy. It is helpful as a supervisor to focus on setting and conveying clear goals, equipping employees with the tools needed for a smooth transition updating staff often, and checking in with them on a regular basis.

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It is also important to acknowledge and validate their emotions, show appreciation for everyone's efforts, and celebrate milestones.

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Now, let's go ahead and take a closer look at the five roles of a supervisor. As suggested by Prosci, a company known for helping agencies through challenging changes. Though, we do not endorse this company or any other products, this model here can be helpful for us as supervisors.

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Again, these are just some of the roles that supervisors play when managing a change.

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Number 1, communicator. In any new situation, people try to make sense of what has changed. Employees want clear messages about how their work and their team will be affected. You can communicate through e-mail, meetings, scheduled at regular times, policies and procedures, training or even an open-door policy. Finding why will help them with their own personal internal reactions.

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For example, if processes around data collection are being changed, provide your staff with the reason this is now important and how their role in the accurate collection affects the outcome. It is also important to let them know about the timing of the change and whether they will be provided with training before it is implemented. Providing up-front, clear, and consistent updates on projected changes is vital. It is also important to remember that the new questions and concerns will continue to emerge and it is important to address everything that comes up promptly.

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Another important aspect of this role is to be honest and authentic, right? Sharing the why provides individuals on your team a reason to change. It is important to actually believe what you say and do as a supervisor. You, as a supervisor, can help your employees answer some of these questions here that you see on the slide. Why are we doing this? What does this change mean for me? What am I going to lose? And more, importantly, what as an employee am I going to gain?

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Another extremely important role is that of an advocate. Managers and supervisors absolutely need to show their support in active and insurable ways. You want to convey confidence in the change, right? If a manager supports or resists a change, then it is appropriate to expect the same from their direct reports. To use the same example as earlier about changes in collecting data, consider what the experience would be like for employees whose manager isn't on board with the change.

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In that case perhaps the manager is extremely vague about training, and they trivialize or are dismissive about the change or drag their feet on making sure employees have the resources, tools and support they need. Not only will the employees not get what they need, they will also get very frustrated with the unspoken message that the supervisor is sending via their actions or inactions in behavior. The key to this role is that managers and supervisors must first be on board with the change prior to supporting their employees.

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it is also extremely important to act as a coach through stages of change. Successful, you know, change management truly involves your ability as a supervisor to guide employees through the process of change and insure that your employees have an awareness, you know, on why things are being changed, that they have a true desire to participate and support the change, that they have the correct knowledge and ability to implement the change, and that there will be continued reinforcement to sustain the change long term. You know, as a supervisor, strengthening your relationship with your employees by individually coaching them through the change process or their internal psychological process can help them address barriers. Even guidance such as encouraging discussion, questions and feedback even while acknowledging challenges can help everyone overcome the anxiety and confusion often found when changes occur.

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It is truly important and in this part of your role to either coach each employee on their own if needed or as a group. You can actually keep this list here as kind of a resource for coaching points.

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All right. Managers and supervisors are actually the main link connecting employees to upper management. They provide information from leadership to the team and also have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the team and provide feedback to leadership.

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Let's use the same example again about changing how you collect certain data. Some employees may have historical knowledge about how changes in collecting data affect other aspects of the work flow, so while you are letting your staff know about these process changes, you can also learn from the staff and turn this into helpful feedback for your supervisors and management. The key here is this: Listen to upper management and gain clarification for yourself if needed, so you, as a supervisor, can openly and successfully relay information to your team. Encourage your employees to ask questions and provide feedback so you can actually offer input to those above you.

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Managers and supervisors are also in the best place to identify what resistance looks like and where it is coming from and the true source of that resistance. They are also best suited to actively manage that resistance when it occurs. For example, some employees could be hesitant and anxious about returning to their office after sustained teleworking. Ask questions around what barriers may prohibit them from working in the office, what worries they might have, and how they think those things will affect their ability to maintain work standards. Is it possible for you to bend a little bit? Can you as a supervisor offer them a flexible schedule or maybe new processes to streamline their workload? Once you can actually determine the reason why they are hesitant, you can actual protestor vide them with the tools to be successful.

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Something else to consider is conceptualizing resistance as a lack of readiness as it is more of a friendly approach. If you can figure out what is actually preventing an employee from being ready, then you'll better know how to ease their internal transition process and help them overcome their fear, anxiety, sense of loss, et cetera.

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a good tip for this role is to ask questions and truly try to dig deeper with your employee so you can help determine the actual cause of their hesitation. Practice empathy by allowing individuals to express their doubts and misgivings without being defensive and truly as we know the last year, people need an outlet to talk and so it is part of your job to create a safe environment for them to speak.

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As we all know, leading in times of change can be hard and a little bit scary, but we need to remember it can be even harder for our teams and they are looking for us to guide them and kind of, you know, keep them on the path to success.

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So before we move on to some additional guidance in the next section, I would like to give you an opportunity to think about these five roles and how you feel you would either do or perform in each of them. Are there any skills that you hope to either gain or improve? As a reminder, communicator is your role to either share information and updates about the change as an advocate, you promote and support the change, and as a coach you educate and guide employees through the change, as a liaison, you report up and down about changes that are occurring and then as a resistance manager, you manage any kind of pushback to the change. So Tammy if you could go ahead and bring up the poll, that would be great.

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Okay. The poll is up now everyone.

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Please let us know which of these five roles do you plan to strengthen. You have about 43 seconds left.

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We have been having some global audio issues today, so Thank you, Everyone for hanging in there with us. You have about 27 seconds left on the poll. Looks like we have a lot of responses coming in. please keep them coming. A crew have about six seconds left and the poll will end and I will show the results here in just one second.

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[ Inaudible. ]

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Okay. There you go.

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Okay. So I am hooking up the results of the poll now. It seems that's a lot of supervisors plan on improving their role as a communicator and a coach and as a resistance manager. And, of course, all of those aspects of our role are extremely important. Thanks, Everyone.

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Continue on. All right. I will continue on with a little more guidance. Over 94% of all workers view interesting and-or exciting work as the most important factor in feeling motivated. Allow your employees to have input. If possible, allow them to volunteer for projects or work outside their job description, or get training to develop a new skill. Remember that changes have already been made to -- have Auld ready made certain things different and employees could be ready to think about the next steps in their career.

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Capitalizing on their openness and insuring that their work is engaging can truly be part of consolidating those new beginnings for the third phase of the transition process.

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Normalizing discomfort or loss through the change process can also be very helpful to your employees. Let them know that discomfort is normal and that they will feel uncomfortable. Encourage them to verbalize their concerns. If you have ever heard the phrase get comfortable being uncomfortable, you know that it is a part of human life and really necessary for growth and progress. In fact, some of you could even be thinking now, you know, change happens all the time. What is their problem? You know? It is -- this isn't new, this isn't unexpected. It can be tempting to claim you know privilege when you're truly faced with any kind of, you know, resistance or pushback from employees, but it is important to remember that there are many different types of people and personalities in the workplace.

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While previously supervisors may have managed teleworking employees, the last year has amplified the need to examine telework as many employees transitioned from an office location to working from their home rather quickly. This huge external change led to a whole new set of obstacles for managers and a complicated process for transition for most people. Going forward, there is really no clarity on what the future will bring in respect to teleworking. Will most employees return to the office? Or will there be hybrid arrangements? You have all learned a lot by doing over the past 15 months, so it might be important to just kind of provide a few guidelines and tips that are specifically important for supervising, you know, employees as neigh work from home. Though your role as a supervisor is the same, you know, if -- whether employees are working at home or in the office, you could utilize additional tools to help your team through a change in the agency. And as you can see here on this slide, some of these skills and tools include clarifying expectations and roles, communicating more often, helping your staff create structure while working at home. Developing clear policies and procedures, encouraging social interaction and team building activities, and then, of course the most important aspect is to be flexible. Right? As things change.

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As you all I probably have heard and have implemented self-care is truly important and it plays a vital role in one's ability to be present, stay calm, and really manage effectively in times of change. As a supervisor, taking care of yourself will only help you better take care of your staff. As well, modeling appropriate stress management is a great way to encourage your staff to take care of themselves and these same suggestions can be utilized while coaching employees that are having a difficult time with changes in the workplace.

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It is extremely important to engage with family, friends, and community groups and I think that all of us have seen that or have learned that even more with the events that have occurred this past year. It is extremely important, as well, to take care of your body and to avoid negative outlets such as, you know, drugs, or drinking or poor food choices. If you are not healthy on the inside, it is very hard to be -- to be healthy and be a strong leader.

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It is also extremely important to embrace healthy practices and this can mean a lot of different things for different people, but it can include keeping things in perspective, accepting change in your own life or in your role as a supervisor, practicing gratitude, and learning from your past.

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And additionally, there are various agency resources to help you. You know, consulting with other supervisors is always a great idea and it is also important to take advantage of agency benefits.

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I'm sure a lot of you, you know, are aware of this, but we as supervisors cannot give people what we do not have, so if you want to radiate kindness and emotional intelligence and resilience, you really have to be at first. You can't pour from an empty cup. The termite bit technically means bend without breaking. It can also be described as one's ability to be calm and grounded during changes. So using your support system, prioritizing physical and emotional health, and accessing resources will allow you to better adapt to change and remain flexible.

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Focusing on yourself will truly pay off when taking care of your staff.

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We do have one more poll question and I invite you to think about this final question as a takeaway from today's presentation. Tammy, if you can bring up the poll.

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And the question is --

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Go ahead Tammy.

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Yes. What will you do more of to help you and your employees work through future workplace changes? So go ahead and look at those responses and select the one that you best agree with. Looks like we have about 27 seconds left. We do have a lot of responses coming in so please keep them coming.

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All right. We have about ten seconds. The poll will be ending shortly. one second while I pull up the results.

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Okay. So thank you Tammy. I am looking at the results now. It looks like the majority of supervisors here today plan to communicate more often with their employees which is great. And then a few supervisors plan honor normalizing discomfort for their staff and gaining a better understanding of the phases of change and transition. thank you, everyone, for participating. We'll move on.

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All right. So as we all know, change in our lives is constant in work and outside of work. And by having an understanding of change in transitions, you can take the necessary steps to lead your employees amidst change. The main self aware and reflect on your own anxieties about change and learn to embrace change as a positive aspect of your work. Being able to utilize specific skills and tools will help Move your employees through change or chaos. Finally, increase your ability to handle change through your own self-care. Remember, you can actually reach out to the E



A.P. any time day or night if you or your employees need additional support. As a supervisor, you can also utilize the EAP for consultation on various issues that may arise during changes in agency. This is not counseling but it is actually a way for you to identify areas you struggle with and develop goals that will help you improve your ability to manage.

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As Tammy stated earlier in the beginning of the presentation, everyone is going to receive a list of books and articles and sites online that can help you, you know, find out any additional information if you so desire. All right, Tammy, I will hand this back to you so we can have a time for everyone to ask questions.

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Okay. Great. Thank you so much, Jen. If you would like more information on this or other health and wellness topics, please call us or visit us online at FOH for you to cot. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to help you through your work related issues. The recording and transcript, and more will be e-mailed out to you after the webinar and all of today's content will be available on FOH4 you.com in two weeks. Before getting to your questions when you exit you will see a satisfaction survey, please let us know how we did. We work to make adjustments on your feedback so we appreciate you filling out that survey. We do have some questions.

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If anyone does have a question, go to the Q and A and send it to all panelists. Jen, the first question is, how do I practice self-care with so little time in my busy life?

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That is a good question. Yes. so as supervisors and, you know, adults who have extremely hectic schedules with kids and families, it can be really hard to actually schedule in the time or find the time to help yourself, but self-care doesn't have to take a long time. It can include sayings such as insuring you are putting inappropriate boundaries in your life. It can be getting up from your desk at home and taking a five-minute walk outside, or getting a glass of water. It is actually a lot of the small things you do every day that can add up to like a really big difference in how you feel.

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Great. Thanks, Jen. Next question is, how do I as a supervisor best share news about a change that I know will make staff upset, angry or sad?

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Okay. Yes, that is a good question, too. I think it is truly important to start by, you know, by responding empathetically and acknowledging how hard, you know, that change or changes are, you know? And then truly help your employee or your staff switch focus from yes, this is hard, this is difficult, this is uncomfortable, to okay, how do I take the next steps in moving forward?

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Thanks. And how do I as a supervisor best relate poor feedback in questions to leadership?

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Yes.

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[ Inaudible. ]

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Again, start with, I think, being genuine and acknowledge how hard this change has been for some of your staff or all your staff, and then, you know, provide the feedback that you have been given, you know, from your staff and really allow for it to be an open communication about how can we improve this in any way.

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Thanks so much. We're going to go ahead and wrap up the webinar a little early today. We have had some global audio issues. Thank you for bearing with us today. And if we didn't get to your question or if you have additional concerns, please call the EAP to speak with one of our consultants who can help you with your specific situation. I'd like to thank Jen Tobey once again for presenting today, and I want to thank you for taking time to be here with us today. Have a wonderful rest of your day!

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Thank you, Tammy.  
[Event concluded]