

Adapting to Change

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will discover how agility and resilience are necessary skills for driving progress on the job.

Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. The Certainty of Change
 - a. Being Proactive
 - b. Reacting Appropriately
2. Agility: A Growth Mindset
3. Agility in the Workplace



BEFORE YOU START

Think for a moment about some of your happiest memories. Maybe you've experienced one or more of the following:

- Getting married
- Meeting your partner for the first time
- Having your first child
- Adopting a special pet
- Buying or renting a new home
- Starting a job in a new city

What do special memories like these all have in common?

One thing these events have in common is that each marks a significant life change. In this lesson, we'll look at why navigating change is important at work and at home. We'll also see how change sometimes comes our way when we least expect it.

1. The Certainty of Change

You might have heard the saying, "the only constant in the modern world is change." Most of us deal with change every day. Maybe there's construction along your usual drive home, or your schedule gets hit with unexpected meetings. But not all change is unexpected. You can drive positive change in your life to improve any situation you find yourself in at work and at home. Change happens both quickly and gradually and you

can use your **agility skill** to contend with it. Your agility skill is embracing change and effectively adapting when things around you are constantly in motion.



TERM TO KNOW

Agility Skill

The ability to embrace change and effectively adapting when things around you are constantly in motion.

1a. Being Proactive

It's human nature to embrace what's comfortable or to think that if something has worked in the past, there is no reason to do things differently now. This is called the **status quo bias**. People who adhere to a status quo bias are often afraid of making poor decisions or they underestimate the positive outcomes that change can bring. It's important to break free from such thinking and recognize that change is a necessary ingredient for accomplishing your goals.



THINK ABOUT IT

Would you be taking this course or reading this lesson right now if you weren't proactive and open to new things?

Whether you know it or not, you embraced and planned for change when you opened this lesson. Maybe you weren't sure about the topic or what would be asked of you, but here you are! Taking this course is a planned event that represents an agile shift in your life. While it comes with some degree of uncertainty, you chose to be proactive and learn something new and interesting. Being open to change opens doors.



TERM TO KNOW

Status Quo Bias

A personal preference for keeping things as they are.

1b. Reacting Appropriately

Being able to pivot has become the new normal in today's workplace, which is why employers look to hire and retain people who can drive positive change and react to unexpected events in healthy ways using agility. Another skill you've already learned about, self and social awareness, also plays into agility. When you know about yourself and your common reactions, you can train yourself to remain flexible when things don't go as planned.

Here are some characteristics of people who use their agility skill effectively (O'Donnell 2019). Can you think of any others?

- They believe in their skills, talents, and abilities.
- They accept the fact that change is inevitable.
- They have strategies for handling new situations.
- They stay calm and keep their emotions in check.
- They bring a positive attitude to every situation.
- They anticipate when change might be coming.
- They are comfortable initiating change themselves.

Read the example below and answer the question beneath it.



➦ **EXAMPLE** Zane worked for six years as a magazine editor prior to losing his job to company layoffs. It was a difficult time for Zane and his family. Instead of being upset, Zane set aside the next several weeks to relax, collect his thoughts, and assess what his next steps would entail. Following his respite, Zane was confident that some new and better doors would open. He used his newfound energy to reach out to people in his professional network and began a comprehensive online job search. Not more than two weeks into his search, Zane received a cold call from a former colleague who was interested in his services. Before he knew it, Zane was working in a senior role as a contract-to-hire editor and reporting to a person whom he greatly respected.



THINK ABOUT IT

Which aspects of his agility skill did Zane exercise in this example in reaction to his job loss? What evidence do you have to support your answer?

Here are several possible answers regarding Zane:

- He was confident in his skills because he anticipated that new doors would open.
- He accepted the reality that he was laid off because he did not get upset.
- He implemented a strategy where he would rest before he immersed himself in a job search.
- He stayed calm by collecting his thoughts and taking respite.
- He believed that not only would new opportunities arise, but they'd be *better* opportunities than before.

2. Agility: A Growth Mindset

The word *agility* is often used when people talk about sports, referring to an athlete's ability to move quickly and easily. Like an athlete, someone with a well-developed agility skill demonstrates quick mental reflexes, can easily pivot in their thoughts and actions, and has the ability to sense and react to what might happen next.

A person who can adapt is generally more valuable to an organization than someone who remains rigid in their thoughts and actions. A thought leader named Carol Dweck (2007) calls this characteristic a **growth mindset**. People who think with a growth mindset know their skills and talents will improve over time with hard work. They are confident they'll succeed and persevere no matter what the circumstance (Dweck, 2007).



REFLECT

1. How does approaching a problem from many angles (instead of one) help you overcome the problem and persevere?
2. How does outlining several pathways to reach a goal (instead of one) help you create success?

One takeaway from this reflection is that using your agility skills gives you *options*. It can be liberating to know there are several pathways to a goal or solution than that which is most obvious or habitual. Like a GPS system that reroutes a driver through heavy traffic, your agility skill gives you the power to chart multiple paths.

See if some of the adjectives below describe the way that you approach problems. Think about whether you navigate your personal and professional goals with these descriptors in mind. (An **antonym** has also been provided, which is a word opposite in meaning to the given adjective.)

Adjective	Description	Antonym
Optimistic	You believe that change is an opportunity for growth.	<i>Pessimistic</i>
Adaptable	You recognize that change is necessary to move forward, so you embrace it, modifying your behavior as you surge ahead to achieve your goals.	<i>Rigid</i>
Supportive	You don't complain about new initiatives, especially in front of peers. If you do have serious concerns, you make them in private to your manager.	<i>Discouraging</i>
Proactive	You use your initiative skill to seek out areas to grow and improve.	<i>Reactive</i>
Stable	You don't become overwhelmed and you can cope when plans shift.	<i>Unstable</i>
Inquisitive	You look for new information so you can anticipate future changes.	<i>Disinterested</i>
Open-minded	You take suggestions and adjust appropriately.	<i>Narrow-minded</i>



TERMS TO KNOW

Growth Mindset

A belief that one can better themselves through training, hard work, and perseverance.

Antonym

A word that is opposite in meaning to another word.

3. Agility in the Workplace

"Success today requires the agility and drive to constantly rethink, reinvigorate, react, and reinvent."
Bill Gates, Microsoft Co-Founder

Because technology is rapidly changing the workplaces of today, employees need to be willing to learn and adapt to new situations and software. But it's not just technology that causes changes—outsourcing, downsizing, mergers, and a general feeling of uncertainty means that modern workers need to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Read the scenario below to see what these characteristics of agility might look like in the world of work.



IN CONTEXT

Karlie works as a receptionist in a bustling medical office. Her office managers have decided to change the way they remind patients of their appointments. The new system replaces phone call reminders with text message reminders, and Karlie wants to be a part of the new initiative.

She is optimistic that patients will be really pleased with the new texting program. She volunteers to take lead on learning the new technology and teaching it to her peers. She also takes the initiative to research the effectiveness of current programs and how to troubleshoot the messaging system. Karlie even designed a patient survey to distribute when patients arrive for visits—some patients requested that the clinic location be added to the text reminder and Karlie was quick to acknowledge and implement the suggestion. Some elderly patients struggled with the text messaging, so Karlie brought that feedback to management. Everyone agreed that some patients still need an option for phone call reminders. Karlie's agility and unique contributions didn't go unnoticed. Based on the success of the program, within months, Karlie was promoted to assistant office manager.

As this example shows, practicing agility can mean the difference between success and remaining stagnant. It can create opportunities for you. In extreme cases, a lack of focus on agility can even lead to outright failure. Take a company like Blockbuster, who didn't respond to the growing demand for digital entertainment in the new millennium. When Netflix approached Blockbuster in the year 2000 with an offer to sell, Blockbuster failed to see the value in the deal. They weren't able to pivot and adapt in the face of a growing trend. By 2010, Blockbuster had filed for bankruptcy. Whether you work for a large company or are self-employed, agility is the key to riding the waves of change successfully (Graser, 2013).



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you discovered how **agility** and resilience are necessary skills for driving progress on the job and in your personal life. You learned how **change is a certainty** and there are particular attitudes and behaviors that can help you navigate a world in motion, such as optimism and open-mindedness. By **being proactive**, you can make planned changes to improve your quality of life or for professional advancement. If unexpected changes catch you by surprise, it's important to stay positive and **react appropriately**. By using your agility skill in both types of circumstances, it can uncover opportunities that aren't immediately noticeable. Today, more employers are emphasizing **agility in the workplace** in order to stay competitive and relevant.

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