

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



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Adapting to Change in an Ever-Changing World

I prefer to look at change from a positive perspective.

In general, most do not like change and resist it because it moves us into the unfamiliar. By definition, change is the act or instance of making or becoming different. We have all had to become different in our processes, interactions, and daily lives lately. I prefer to look at change from a positive perspective. Looking at the positive outcomes of change allows us to recognize the change and make it familiar. Did you know it actually takes more energy and time to resist change than it does to go along with or initiate change? Resisting change can be exhausting and mood altering.

Everyone is speaking of the new normal, but really, what is normal? Normal is the typical state, the status quo, or the expected. When we realize that change usually occurs in small subtle ways and over time, it then becomes our normal and what we consider normal is really evolving daily. The changes we have seen and been involved in have occurred rapidly, challenging us to adapt and accept the unfamiliar quickly. Did you ever see yourself using the phrase social distancing on a daily basis, much less trying to enforce that concept?

The status quo was disrupted in such a way that jurisdictions for the first time in many years (or in some cases for the first time) had to implement their emergency management plan (EMP) and their continuity of operations plan (COOP). This change in daily operations reshaped our standard operating procedures. The value in maintaining updated EMPs and COOPs has never been more obvious. The time and effort in keeping these plans updated has made us aware of the value of maintenance. I have always thought it was better to have a plan and not need it, rather than not have a plan and need it. So many have been working in emer-

gency operations centers for longer than we ever expected. They are dealing with not only the changing face of the pandemic but also hurricanes, flooding, and other disasters, all the while adapting to change and performing these functions with professionalism and character.

Food service operations have adapted and changed. While food safety is always a priority for food service operations, the change in food service provided a more intense focus on food safety. In order to generate sales, some food establishments began assembling meal kits with raw ingredients to sell to customers, as well as transitioned to offering food through takeout, drive-thru, and delivery services. These new features from food establishments were unfamiliar territory. This situation provided an opportunity for food safety professionals and food service operations to partner to provide proper handling and preparation information to customers, thereby extending the reach of food safety education.

Environmental health programs have participated in educating the public on topics of disease transmission and prevention, which is not new to the profession but is now more visible and necessary. Disease testing criteria and protocol information have become more routine than ever before. Providing instructions on proper hand washing and emphasizing the overall importance and impact of hand wash-

ing to the public is again not new but necessary. These instances are changing the scope of daily activities and providing a platform for environmental health to emphasize a variety of topics ranging from basic hand washing to active managerial control. It is also changing how the public views environmental health and how we carry out our jobs, and overall, it is changing how we interact.

Interactions have become virtual due to the need to keep personnel safe. State and local health departments have become engaged in providing virtual inspections, education, and training, as well as meetings. While the technology to go virtual has been available, the change in circumstances has been the catalyst to move in this direction. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella has commented that the pandemic has caused her company to experience “two years’ worth of digital transformation in two months.”

To everyone in all aspects and fields of environmental health—thank you! Since the beginning of the year, we have been challenged with new responsibilities, new ways to perform our duties, new working conditions, and new protocols that change frequently. The flexibility and dedication shown have been outstanding. Looking at our profession from a fresh perspective and realizing that we are adaptable and creative can shape the future of our profession.

Author Mary Anne Radmacher said, “Change, of any sort, requires courage.” We, as environmental health professionals, possess that courage. 🐼

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