



Adaptability



Founding Sponsor



upskillsforwork.ca



Welcome to *UP Skills for Work*!

The program helps you build your **soft skills**, which include:

- motivation
- presentation
- adaptability
- attitude
- teamwork
- stress management
- accountability
- time management
- confidence

When you have these skills, you have the foundation you need to work well with others—at work, at home, and in your community. That's part of why employers are looking for people with strong soft skills!



Soft skills are ways of acting or thinking that make it easier to work well with other people. Sometimes they're called "people skills."

This workshop

Our world is changing faster than ever before, and being able to deal with change is an important life skill. Many jobs are also changing quickly. Being able and willing to learn new ways of doing things is a skill that can help you be more successful at work. This skill is called **adaptability**.

In this workshop, we will explore how we respond to change. We will also learn strategies for coping better with change. We'll look at why adaptability at work is important. We'll also talk about what to do if you are asked to make changes that go against your core values.

Partners in development of *UP Skills for Work*:

Futureworx

For more information on soft skills, check out futureworx.ca



What is adaptability?

When you think about someone or something who shows **adaptability**, what do you see?

- A young child who comes to Canada from another country and quickly learns a new language and way of life?
- A friend who loses their job, but goes back to school to learn new skills and qualifies for a new, better job?
- Or maybe the raccoon who gets into your garbage? Raccoons have adapted well to city life!
- In this workshop, we are talking mostly about adaptability at work, but there are many times in life when we need to adapt to changes.



Adaptability is how you react to change.



Let's talk about it

- What does being adaptable mean to you?
- Can you think of a time when you had to adapt to a change in your life?
- We have to adapt to small changes every day. Can you think of some examples?

A place for your notes:

Warm up



Exploring change: Two activities

Activity 1:

Cross your arms over your chest. Now cross them the other way.

- Did you find it easy or hard to switch the way you cross your arms?
- Most of us have made a habit of crossing our arms one way. Why do habits feel easier than new ways? Why are habits hard to change?
- Do you think that with practice, crossing your arms the other way would get easier?

When we repeat an action many times our brain makes a strong pathway of connections. That's why it feels so easy. Changing the action feels awkward at first, because our brain has to make a new pathway. It takes practice to make a new pathway strong.

Game 2:

Gather up your things, stand up, and choose a new seat. Take a minute to get settled.

- How did it feel to be asked to find a new place to sit?
- Did you view changing seats as a good chance to sit with someone? Or was it an uncomfortable change? Or maybe a bit of both?
- Would you rather go back to your old seat now, or stay in the new place?

We all have our own ways of responding to change. Some people enjoy lots of change. Others prefer a more settled life. There is no "right" way to be, as long as you can adapt to what's needed.



Let's think about it

- How does a person show adaptability at work?
- How do you know if someone has trouble adapting at work? How do they act?
- As a group, discuss how you might describe what each person might look like and sound like in these work situations:

	Adaptable	Not adaptable
Has to start working with a new team		
Helping customers waiting in a long lineup		
New software isn't working well		
Arrives at job site to find needed materials weren't delivered		

A place for your notes:



How adaptable am I?

For each description, check the column that is most like you.

	Almost always; this is easy for me	Most of the time; but it can be stressful	Sometimes; I often find this difficult	I'm not sure
I adapt to change quickly				
I am willing to learn new skills and procedures				
I am open to new ideas				
I look for ways to make changes work, rather than focusing on why they won't				
I stay calm and look for solutions when problems arise				



Let's talk about it

- Which of these features of adaptability comes most easily to you?
- Which one is most challenging?

A place for your notes:



Resisting change

Change is not always easy! Most people get comfortable in the routines they know, so their first reaction to change might be negative or uncertain.



Meet Calla

Calla is a personal support worker (PSW) at a long-term care home. One morning she arrives at work after an ice storm to find that not many staff members have made it in. “We need you on the 4th floor today,” says her supervisor. “They only have one PSW. And sorry, but until more staff arrive you’re going to be really busy.”

Calla is angry. She always works on the 3rd floor, with the same residents. The 4th floor is for dementia and stroke patients who need a lot more care. Some are very confused or easily upset. These patients don’t know Calla, and they might not trust her right away.

“It’s not fair,” she thinks. “I went to the trouble to come to work even in bad weather, and it’s like I’m being punished for it.”



Let’s talk about it

- If Calla stays angry, how will that affect her day?
- Even a short-term change in routine or minor crisis can be hard to adjust to. What might help Calla cope better?
- Can you think of any positive outcomes for Calla that she can’t see at the moment?

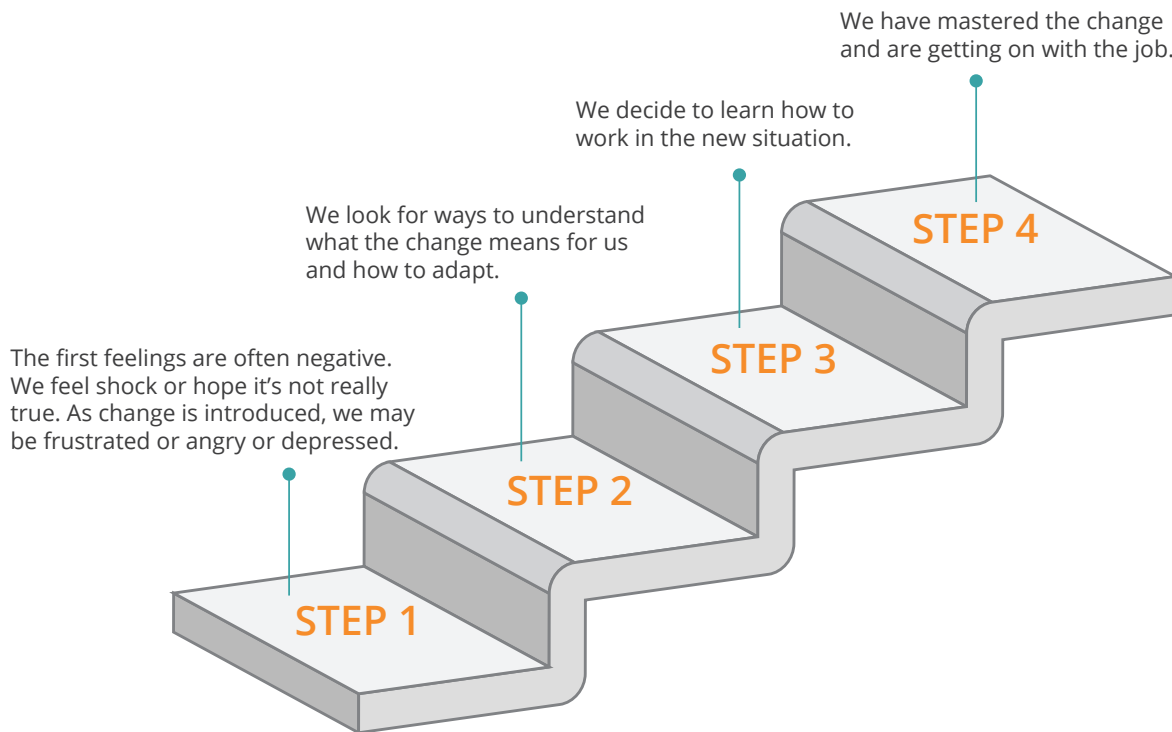


Change can be good, bad, or a bit of both. What’s good for the company is not always so good for the workers. But sometimes what seems like a change for the worse leads to new opportunities.



Steps to change

When people are faced with challenging changes, they go through steps on the way to adapting.



Employees who adapt well are able to work through step 1 and move on. They focus on handling the change in the best way possible.



Thinking about change:

- Some life changes are very difficult. In these cases, step 1 can take some time and feel a lot like grief, as we work through feelings of loss for what used to be.
- Even changes that we are happy and excited about demand adaptability. Think of getting married, having a baby, or getting a big promotion. What are some uncomfortable changes that might come with these happy events?



Adaptability in action

Being flexible and willing to make changes helps you deal with all of life's ups and downs. It will also make you a more valuable employee.



Meet Fouad

Fouad and his family came to Canada from Syria. He is a very skilled drywall installer. In Syria he created beautiful sculpted ceilings.

But Fouad learns that this type of ceiling is not popular in Canada. And until his English is better, he will have trouble finding work on building sites. He is discouraged.

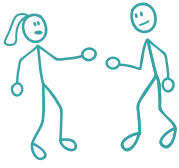
Then a company that maintains apartment buildings offers Fouad a job painting and repairing drywall. It doesn't use all his skills or pay very well, but he says it's a good start. He's learning the English language words that he needs for work. He works hard and does a good job. His boss is pleased with his work. When Fouad has a chance to apply for a better job, he will have a good reference.



Let's talk about it

- Moving to a country that is very different from your own takes a great deal of adaptability. What are some of the changes immigrants like Fouad must adapt to?
- Moving to a city from a rural or remote home is also a big change in your way of life. What are some adaptations rural people have to make when they come to the city?
- It's normal to feel down, like Fouad did, when your goals seem blocked. How did he find a way to move forward?

A place for your notes:



Meet Dawn

Dawn works at a small shoe factory. She likes how everyone who works there knows each other and takes pride in their products. Then the owners sell the business to a major shoe manufacturer. Dawn is told that the small factory will be shut down, but some workers will be offered jobs at the new company's main factory.

At first Dawn is very upset. The new factory is on the edge of the city, and she doesn't want to travel that far. She doesn't like the idea of a huge workplace. She thinks she might quit.

But she makes herself keep an open mind. That night, she writes down her questions. The next day at an information session, she learns that the factory is not that hard to get to. It has just had a big upgrade, with new equipment. Also, they have a good health insurance and benefits plan. That's something Dawn can really use.

At her interview with the new owners, Dawn is ready to sell herself. She says that she already works hard to quickly master new tasks, so she's confident she can adapt to the new factory. She tells them that she is excited to increase her skills by training on the new machinery.

Dawn is hired, and because she learns fast and has a good attitude, she is soon promoted to supervisor. "I do miss the old place," she says. "But here I have more chance to move ahead. The change has been good for me."

A place for your notes:



Let's talk about it

On the chart below, list some of the things Dawn thought, said, and did, to help herself adapt to the changes in her job.

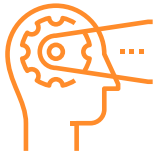
Thought	
Said	
Did	

- Why is it sometimes hard to act like Dawn and make the best of change?

A place for your notes:

How to increase our adaptability

Adaptability is a skill we can learn. Like any other skill, it takes practice! Here are some ways to practice adaptability:



Look for different points of view and try to understand them.

Try this in your group: Each person shares how they feel about: winter, spicy foods, horror movies, pet rats, camping. You'll probably get some very different reactions. Listen carefully to why each person feels that way.



Try out another person's way of doing a task, even if it's not what you prefer. Even simple things, like taking a different driving route, will help you be more flexible when working with others.



Be a learner.

People who are confident learners will adapt more easily. Try to see every experience, every challenge, as a chance to learn and grow. Ask yourself: what did I learn from that experience? What went well? What will I do differently next time?



Pretend you have a new job.

We tend to resist change because it upsets our comfortable work habits. So imagine you are just starting the job. At a new job, you come ready to learn. That attitude will help you adapt quickly.



Turn challenges into opportunities.

Adaptable people look for opportunities when things change. So when something happens that seems bad, take a minute to identify any possible “silver linings.” Here’s a starting exercise:

Event	Unwanted outcome	Possible opportunity
Snowstorm	Your planned trip is cancelled	
Reduced hours at work	You make less money	
Angry customer	You get yelled at and feel upset	
Basement flood	A big mess to clean up	



Staying true to yourself

Being adaptable is a good thing, in work and in life.

But being adaptable does not mean that you accept all change, no matter what. We all have core values that we aren't willing to give up. We also have other responsibilities besides work: for example, to our families, our morals and our own well-being.



Core values are ideas that are so important to us, they guide how we live our lives.

What are my values?

Take some time to identify what some of your core values are, at home and at work. Circle any value that is important to you. Write down any others that you think are missing.

Fitness **Creativity**

Service to others **Courage**

Honesty **Reliability** **Good humor**

Open-mindedness **Compassion**

Positivity **Loyalty**

Learning **Spirit of adventure**

Respect **Motivation**

Passion

Now list the values you've circled in the chart below. You can write the value in both columns if that feels right for you.

Values for my home life	Values for work

Job versus values

- Jenna's company wants her to move to the night shift. But Jenna is a single mom and being with her kids in the evening is very important to her.
- Pierre works at a water filtration plant. He is told to make changes that will save money. But he knows the new process is not as safe. He worries that people may get sick from bad water.
- There have been staff cutbacks and Mario is now doing two people's jobs. He is working overtime every day and has no time for himself. He eats takeout food most nights, he hasn't gone for a run or seen his friends for weeks, and his apartment is a mess.



Resilience

Life is full of ups and downs. Part of being adaptable is being able to get through the tough parts, recover, and carry on. That's **resilience**.



When someone is **resilient**, they are able to become strong, healthy or successful again after something difficult happens.



Both adaptability and resilience have a lot to do with changing our negative assumptions and beliefs, so that we can take positive action.

Resilient people tend to have some things in common:

1. They are hopeful, but also realistic.
2. They are able to keep their emotions from overwhelming them.
3. They are able to think through problems and take steps to deal with them.
4. They reach out to others for support when they need it.

None of us are resilient *all* the time. We may be very resilient in some parts of our life, and struggle with others. Or if we face many challenges at one time, we may temporarily run out of resilience.

A place for your notes:



How can I learn to be more resilient?

What makes us resilient? Generally, it's the way we think. We can all become more resilient by learning to challenge and change the way we think about upsetting events.

Meet Manuel and Naheem

Manuel and Naheem are new employees. At their three-month review, they both get quite a few negative comments. Naturally, they are both upset.



Manuel feels terrible all day. He is sure he is going to be fired. "I can't do this job," he thinks. "And they don't like me. There's nothing I can do to change that." He lies awake all night, thinking that now he'll never find another job. He dreads going to work the next day. Maybe he just won't go. They're going to fire him anyway, so what's the point?



Naheem also feels terrible. "I thought I was doing OK," he thinks. "But I didn't realize those areas were so important." He is really upset all the way home, but that evening he tells himself, "There's no point sitting here being upset about it. I need to figure out if I can make this better." He thinks about all the feedback he got, and tries to make a plan to improve each item. "I've done well in jobs before; I can do this too," he tells himself. He decides to ask to meet with his supervisor first thing the next day to share how he plans to improve his work.



Let's talk about it

- How did Manuel's thoughts make him feel? How did they help or get in the way of him in dealing with this setback?
- How did Naheem's thoughts make him feel? How did they help or get in the way of him dealing with this setback?

The ABCD of resilience

The following model can help you identify and rethink your beliefs about a difficult experience. With practice, it will help you develop a more resilient outlook. Let's use Manuel's story as an example.

A

Activating event

What happened?

The activating event for Manuel was that he received negative feedback during his job review.

B

Beliefs

What negative ideas are you telling yourself about this event?

What negative ideas did Manuel tell himself?

C

Consequence of the beliefs

How do your beliefs make you feel? What do they make you want to do?

How did Manuel's beliefs make him feel? What did Manuel decide to do because of his beliefs?

D

Dispute the beliefs

Are your negative beliefs really true?

Can you find examples in your past experience that argue against these beliefs? Can you think of "optimistic but realistic" beliefs that are just as valid? Try acting on these ideas instead.

What could Manuel tell himself to dispute his negative beliefs?



Congratulations!

You've completed the *UP Skills for Work* Adaptability workbook, and taken the next step in building your soft skills. For the last activity, we hope you'll make a **pledge**. The **pledge** can be personal, or you can share it with others.



A **pledge** is a serious promise to yourself or to others.

My pledge

I pledge to work on my adaptability by:

Sometimes a pledge needs an **action plan**.



An **action plan** is a list of steps you'll take to make your pledge happen.

My action plan

Goal	
When I will reach it	
How I will reach it	
What I need to do first	
Who will support me	
Strategies for setbacks	