



# EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

December 2023



## DEER OAKS PRESENTS

December On-Demand Seminar

### *Embrace Change*

*Available OnDemand starting December 19th  
Access via [deeroakseap.com](http://deeroakseap.com)*

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# EMBRACING CHANGE

It's natural to view change with some caution. The human brain is primed to be wary of the unknown, which can hold danger, and to conserve energy by sticking to established routines. Change pushes you to venture into the unknown and try out new patterns of thought and behavior. While change can be uncomfortable at times, it can also offer valuable opportunities for growth. With change can come new ways to find happiness and personal fulfillment.

Here are some ideas for overcoming a natural fear of change and shifting to an approach where you do more than just accept change; you embrace it and act on the opportunities that it presents:

- **Acknowledge the change.** The first step in dealing with a change is to recognize and face it. When you're afraid of a change, it's tempting to ignore it or hide from it. Instead, take a cold, hard look at what is happening around you. Identify and learn about the changes that are affecting you or might affect you.
- **Notice and accept your feelings about the change.** It's normal to feel fear, sadness, anger, or other uncomfortable emotions when facing a change. There's nothing wrong with having those feelings. Notice them, name them, and accept them. Living with your feelings helps you face the change openly and move through it.
- **Do a reality check on your fears.** Identifying your fears gives you a chance to test their validity. How likely is the outcome you fear? What could you do to influence a different outcome?
- **Consider the positive possibilities in the change.** Change can disrupt your routine and the patterns of your life, but it can also bring new opportunities. Look at the change as an adventure, and think about the positives it could bring. Is this a chance to learn new skills, meet new people, or shift to more interesting and rewarding work?
- **Visualize positive outcomes from the change.** Imagine what the positive possibilities in the change could mean for you. Visualize how your life might be better and how you might feel if those positive outcomes become real. By making those positive outcomes real in your mind, you can gain confidence to act in ways that make them more likely.



- **Focus on what you can control.** You can waste a lot of emotional energy worrying about things you can't control. Step back, and break the change you're facing into parts. What parts can you control or at least influence? You can learn about the change, for example, acquire new skills, and control your reactions to events. You probably can't stop the change from happening. Focus your thinking and your actions on the things that are within your sphere of influence. Accept and let go of the rest.
- **Talk with supportive people.** Social support can be a huge help when facing any challenge in life. Talk with people you trust and know to be supportive about the change you're facing, your feelings about it, and your thoughts on how you might respond. Friends and family can offer support and an audience to test your ideas. A professional therapist can help you deal with difficult emotions. A life coach or career coach can help you imagine new paths forward and take steps toward them.

- **Take action, starting with small steps.** All big changes start with a first step, and you're more likely to succeed if you start with a small one. Decide on one action you can take in response to the change and take a small step in that direction.
- **Learn from mistakes and setbacks.** When you enter unfamiliar territory during change, you're bound to make mistakes and run into roadblocks. Don't let those setbacks discourage you and cause you to give up. Look at them as learning opportunities. Welcome the new information they give you. What might you do differently on your next try? Is there a different path you might take?
- **Celebrate progress.** Allow yourself to feel good about the first small steps you take. Feel your pride in making progress and learning something new. Feel the excitement of having new experiences. Share your accomplishments with friends. Celebrate when you reach milestones.

By facing change rather than avoiding it, looking for the positive opportunities it might offer, and taking small steps, even the most cautious people can learn to embrace change. Look at the next change you face as a chance to grow and to learn from new experiences.

*Source: Morgan, H. (2023, March 31). Embracing change (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).*



## WHEN YOU'RE NOT GOING HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

When the decision is made to not return home for the holiday season, you can be faced with a number of emotions. Whether you're not able to head home for the holiday season because of financial constraints, work commitments, or because you'll be spending the time with your significant other's family, a mixture of reactions can be stirred up. It can be tough to feel as though you're missing out on the childhood and family traditions that often accompany the holidays. It's important to acknowledge any feelings you may be experiencing not only as you inform your loved ones of your plans, but also as you yourself start accepting the reality that you will be celebrating in a different way and perhaps in a different location. There is no right or wrong way to react to any situation; this includes not being able to head home for the holiday season. You may feel sad, angry, or irritable, or maybe it seems bittersweet. No matter what you are experiencing, take care to acknowledge your feelings and refrain from judging them.

Acknowledging your feelings is essential, but communicating these feelings is also critical. The holidays can be stressful, and tensions may be high, so it is important to be up front and communicate what you are feeling to those closest to you in order to avoid unnecessary conflict and misdirected emotions. Being able to acknowledge and communicate your own unique responses to changes in situations, especially with those closest to you, can help with the transition and assist in redefining holiday traditions. If this is the first time or your tenth time that you will not be heading home for the holidays, the below tips and suggestions may be helpful as you begin your own, brand new holiday customs:

- Plan an "alternate" holiday for you and your loved ones. Sometimes, it can be just as exciting knowing you will still be able to participate in the family fun, just maybe not on the specific holiday.
- Perhaps you can recreate in your home what you would be doing with your family. Reinvent some of those memories in your own home, perhaps with your significant other, your roommate, or even a pet!
- Even if you can't physically be with your loved ones, technology can come in handy. Try using Skype, FaceTime, or other social media. Sometimes just hearing familiar voices and sounds can make you feel as if you were there with family.
- Maybe it's too painful to reminisce with those you can't be with. If this is the case, try distracting yourself during high levels of holiday festivities that may fuel homesickness or heartache. Perhaps that means making plans with friends in the area, taking up a new hobby you have wanted to try, or even attending a show or concert.
- Try volunteering! Helping those less fortunate than yourself not only can provide a distraction, but can help you identify with something bigger than yourself.

No matter how you choose to spend the holidays, you have control over how you respond to your emotions. Don't be afraid to reach out for support and talk about how you are dealing with the stress of the season. Remember, everything changes, including where and with whom you celebrate. Don't be afraid of celebrating in a different way and embracing new possibilities.

*Source: Elliott, M. (Revised 2023 [Ed.]). When you're not going home for the holidays (B. Schuette, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.*



## MAINTAINING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE: HANDLING HOLIDAYS, VACATIONS, AND SPECIAL EVENTS

### Ways to Handle Special Occasions

- **Anticipate the event:**
  - Think about what foods and drinks will be served and if you can make requests (e.g. salad dressing on the side, club soda with lime to drink, a lean meat, or vegetarian items).
  - Plan out how you will spend your fat grams and calories for the day.
  - Think ahead about ways to control your calories during the evening (e.g. drinking lots of water, limiting appetizers and desserts, etc.).
  - Focus on the non-eating aspects of the event that you enjoy, such as socializing or dancing.

- **Plan pleasures other than food or drink:**
  - Plan the kind of holiday, vacation, or special event that you want, and make it healthy!
  - Think about what you can do to stay active. Can you make physical activity a part of your holiday, vacation, or special event? A morning or evening walk, swimming laps, or dancing could easily fit the bill.
  
- **Hold a family meeting ahead of time:**
  - How will we handle food and eating out?
  - Can we find a fun way to all be physically active this year?
  - Ask your family to agree to encourage you to eat healthily and be physically active.
  - Talk about other ways your family can help you maintain your goals.
  
- **Set reasonable expectations:**
  - Continue to monitor your eating and physical activity.
  - Weigh yourself often, if possible. Don't forget that scales differ.
  - Plan to maintain your weight; it may not be realistic to expect to lose weight during special events.
  - Let go a little. Eat something special; choose the best, and have a small portion.
  
- **Avoid or reduce stress caused by holidays, vacations, or special events:**
  - Avoid trying to please others more than yourself.
  - Plan daily times to relax.
  
- **Decide what to do about alcohol:**
  - Drinking alcohol may lower self-control, making you more likely to eat and drink beyond what you otherwise would.
  - If you drink, keep track of the calories you are consuming.
  
- **Build in ways to be active:**
  - Be a little more active with any extra time you have.
  - Park further away and walk when doing holiday errands or sightseeing.
  - Look for seasonal ways to be active that can become traditions, such as visiting parks, window shopping at a brisk pace, or even sledding.
  
- **Prepare for the personalities and habits of friends and family.** If you have a relative who likes to push food on everyone, or a friend who is constantly refilling your wine glass, mentally prepare for how you will handle the situation.

- **Plan for pleasures *after* holidays, vacations, or special events.** Sometimes after the holidays or special events, people get the "blahs" and lose motivation to continue their healthy habits. In order to help avoid those feelings, plan something to look forward to in the near future (such as a weekend trip in February or a day spent with friends after a vacation).

## Planning Ahead

Despite the challenges, healthy eating and being active are possible during holidays, vacations, and special events. The key is to plan ahead:

### What problems related to food might come up?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Choose one problem. List some ways to handle it:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Choose the best solution: \_\_\_\_\_

- What will you need to do to make that happen?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- How will you handle things that might get in the way?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

**Plan a non-food reward** (new item of clothing, time for reading, weekend away) for yourself if you are able to follow your plan:

- What will the reward be?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- What will you need to do to earn that reward?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

## Reflect on what's important to you.

It is common to neglect healthy eating and physical activity during holidays, a vacation, or a special event. One reason is too much to do in too little time. To help you manage your time, take a minute to reflect on what's important to you:

- Pretend it is 10 years from now. You are thinking about how you spent holidays, vacations, or special events during those 10 years:
  - What memories would you treasure most?
    - \_\_\_\_\_
    - \_\_\_\_\_
  - What were the most meaningful and enjoyable?
    - \_\_\_\_\_
    - \_\_\_\_\_
- List some other activities and traditions that are not so meaningful or enjoyable (e.g. you may send holiday cards every year but not find much meaning or enjoyment in doing so):
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- Think about how the importance of staying healthy measures up to how you spend your time. How does this impact your priorities for holidays, vacations, and special events?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

## Making Time for a Healthy Lifestyle

Think about the following actions and whether or not you have a difficult time continuing them during special occasions.

*When I get busy during special occasions, I tend to neglect the following behaviors:*

1. \_\_\_ Keeping track of what I eat
2. \_\_\_ Keeping track of physical activity
3. \_\_\_ Doing physical activity
4. \_\_\_ Cooking low-calorie and low-fat foods
5. \_\_\_ Planning ahead when I eat out
6. \_\_\_ Talking back to negative thoughts
7. \_\_\_ Changing problem cues (food, social, or activity cues)
8. \_\_\_ Adding helpful cues (food, social, or activity cues)
9. \_\_\_ Problem-solving things that get in the way of my healthy lifestyle goals
10. \_\_\_ Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_



*Here are some possible ways to make time to do the above things:*

- Cut back on these activities that are less important to me:
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- Make time for healthy eating/physical activity by.... (brainstorm). Choose the best solution(s):
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- What might get in the way? How will I handle this?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (n.d.) Post-core: Handling holidays, vacations, and special events. Retrieved January 4, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov>*