

Why Adaptability & Flexibility Are So Critical

Grades 7-12

Objective: To help students see the value in being (and demonstrate experience with) adaptability

Standards Met: MCDM Target 3 for grades 7-8 (Career Exploration) and 9-12 (Career Preparation)

Time Required: 35-45 minutes

Materials Required: Whiteboard, pencil/paper, handout (if formally assessing the interview question response), PPT of notes, Internet connection & video/audio display if showing the YouTube clip (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2hllvF5gJI>)

ENGAGE

Video & Quote: Show 1 minute video (link above) from the Big Bang Theory (Sheldon's inflexibility about not having "his" seat) and display this quote: "Those who expect moments of change to be comfortable and free of conflict have not learned their history." (Joan Wallach Scott, American Historian)

For your students without access to technology:

Quote: Read the following quote: "Those who expect moments of change to be comfortable and free of conflict have not learned their history." (Joan Wallach Scott, American Historian). Think of various times in our nation's history where individuals (or groups) have not adapted well to change.

Essential Question(s): What are the risks/rewards of change? Why is adaptability/flexibility critical in life and particularly from a career standpoint?

EXPLORE

Discussion Activity: In groups of 3 or 4, discuss the clip and quote. According to the clip and/or quote, change is difficult. Why do you think this is the case? Afterwards, have spokespeople share their responses with the class.

EXPLAIN

Key points:

- *Most* people don't like change. But why is change so hard? (*Solicit responses from groups*)
 - Our brains get *used* to things being a certain way. (It is wired for predictability and familiarity.)
 - It *literally* makes us uncomfortable! (Many people physically react to it – anxiety, nausea, even ulcers)
 - Poor experiences surrounding change can trigger emotions that raise defenses and self-preservation to guard against it (this sometimes leads to retaliation, defiance, shutting down, negativity, etc.)
- Many researchers say flexibility/adaptability are personality traits that are inherent (inborn/easily acquired) to some. Some even get excitement or a thrill from change.

- If you're a "to do" list person, don't like it when things alter your carefully crafted plans, or if you could identify yourself as a perfectionist, you likely are not naturally adaptable
- If you like to "mix things up" now and then, change your room around a lot, or aren't *too* upset when plans change (for good reasons), you're naturally more adaptable
- The good news is, even if it is not a "natural tendency" for you, it is a skill that can be developed

Risks/Rewards Activity: Take some time as a class to discuss the risks/rewards of change. Discuss, also, the risks of *not* changing. Make a brief list of each with the class: risks that come with change, rewards of changing, and risk of inability to change.

Example: Consider when schools everywhere closed during the spring of 2020 which forced everyone to work & learn from home as a result of COVID-19 and how that required you to change/adapt.

Connecting Questions:

- Think of a time where a change occurred that was difficult for you. How did you adapt to it? What resulted from your response to the situation?
- Why is adaptability/flexibility critical in life? Why might it be an important skill for you to develop from a career standpoint?

How to Become Adaptable/Flexible:

Many employers today are continually listing Adaptability/Flexibility as a key skill necessary for the workforce. Yet it's often stated that this skill is lacking in potential employees. One publication – The Flux Report by Right Management (Jan. 2014) – stated that 91% of HR directors believe that by 2018, people will be recruited for jobs on their ability to deal with change and uncertainty.

So, what *does* adaptability and flexibility look like in a job?

- **Keeping an open mind** – being willing to learn new ways of doing things differently; thinking outside the box (be creative)
- **Showing a positive attitude** – look for ways to make changes work rather than looking for ways they won't work
- **Being able *and* willing to come up with Plan B** – planning ahead, but being able to shift gears if directions or priorities change
- **Being quick and agile** – when things change quickly, get on board quickly & respond quickly
- **Demonstrating initiative and self-reliance** – being resourceful & persistent when circumstances are not ideal
- **Being calm** – in the midst of difficulties, dealings with others, deadlines/timelines, etc.

Here are some ways you can *learn* to be more flexible:

- When things change on you, allow yourself a brief, private time for frustration or to be upset
 - But don't allow it to affect others
 - Do it appropriately (and in private, if necessary); don't allow it to ruin your reputation
- Look at the other side; find the good in the situation
 - Embrace it, and think of how it can be made into a positive as much as is possible
 - Remember those changes that turned out well, and it'll allow you to be less stressed

- Practice change
 - Find smaller opportunities to tackle change; it'll prepare you for the big, unexpected, challenging moments

ELABORATE

Final Activity/Assessment:

Be prepared. Life is going to throw you curveballs. And employers want to see how you handle them. It's not enough to say, "I'm adaptable." They need to see evidence of it. *Expect* interview questions around your ability to be flexible/adaptable. Individually, reflect on – and write out – your answer to one of the questions below. Then, pair up with someone and role play. Have your partner be the interviewer and ask you the question. Give your thoughtful, practiced response. Ask your partner for feedback on how you did. Then, reverse roles.

- Describe a time where you showed flexibility in a project you were working on.
- Describe a situation where you had to adapt to difficult circumstances.

EVALUATE

Closure/Exit Ticket: Share this quote with the class for reflection: "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." (Leo Tolstoy, Author of War & Peace) Ask students to share what means to them.

Diving Deeper/Differentiation: For further learning on this topic, have students review the related articles and come up with their own Keys to Adaptability & Flexibility list:

- <http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/adaptability.htm>
- <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-opportunities/being-flexible-and-adaptable/article2529616.ece>
- <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20130802071223AAtuLLI>
- <http://lifehacker.com/5982622/why-youre-so-afraid-of-change-and-what-you-can-do-about-it>

For your students without access to technology: Consider printing off one of the articles above to make available as an additional resource.