Dealing with ambiguity

What is ambiguity?

Ambiguity is an unclear statement, task, or goal. When you encounter an ambiguous situation, you may be unsure of how to proceed because the goal is vague or you don't have access to all of the information you need. Though ambiguity can present many challenges in the workplace, you can learn how to overcome these situations and become a more confident professional.

7 tips for dealing with ambiguity

Plan for the future

When you can, have a general outline for your future in terms of your career. A career path can help you develop more defined goals that help you progress even if you're facing ambiguous situations in your current job or company. Consider where you want to be professionally in the next year, five years, and 10 years, then make a list of the steps you can complete to get there. For example, if you want a managerial position in a year, think about developing your leadership skills and asking for more leadership opportunities.

Remain confident and calm

If you're working in an ambiguous environment, you may be able to better manage your responsibilities to stay confident and calm. Try to approach each task with confidence knowing that your employer or manager chose you for your skills, experience, and education. Use your qualifications to complete your duties to the best of your ability, even if they seem ambiguous. You can always ask for feedback about the quality of your work once you're done.

Staying calm is also a good way to manage an ambiguous situation. To remain calm when you face ambiguity, take a moment to consider what you should be doing and what outcomes your actions can achieve. Considering these factors can help you calmly and confidently approach the situation.

Accept change

Changes in workflow or company structure can often create ambiguity. Accepting these changes and knowing that it's usually acceptable to ask questions to gain more clarity can help you navigate these uncertain situations. If your responsibilities change, consider it a way to learn more skills and contribute more to your team's goals.

Make decisions without having all of the facts

You may encounter different situations in which you need to make progress or decisions without knowing all of the details. In these cases, it's helpful to try to gather as much information as you can to make a guided decision and make notes to explain your reasoning. Closely monitor the outcome of your decision to ensure you have more facts and details if you face a similar situation in the future. You can also ask for feedback from your supervisor or manager when they're available.

Improve your problem-solving skills

Problem-solving skills can help you approach ambiguous scenarios with a more analytical mindset. You may be able to better use the limited tools and information you have to clarify uncertainties and evaluate the situation. To improve your problem-solving skills, try to define the situation and ideal outcomes as best as you can. If you need to choose from multiple options, think about how you would complete each one and how long it would take. Document your process so you can revisit your choices later.

Plan possible alternatives

Creating different plans can help you find more success in your career. If you're unsure of how you feel about your chosen or potential career path, think about other types of jobs that may interest you. For example, if you're in marketing and enjoy the design aspect more than your marketing duties, you could explore careers in graphic design. Researching these opportunities can help you create a more defined long-term plan should you design to make the switch.

Communicate often

To help work through and prevent ambiguity in various situations, continuously communicate with your team members and manager. Asking questions and explaining your plans and progress encourages team communication, which can help you work toward the same goals and objectives. When communicating, be as specific as possible to ensure your message is clear and easy to understand.

References:

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