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I turned 40 last year (I know, it’s hard to believe until you look closely) and my husband gave me an unusual and delightful present. I was slightly bemused to open a scrapbook until I started to flick through the accompanying stack of 40 postcards, each detailing a different challenge.\*

As I read through I found some that were fun (drinking champagne is no hardship), some scary and some downright bonkers.

I found that as well as wondering who on earth was going to let me shear a sheep, I started to think about how I would approach the challenges that could be fun but were also a little bit frightening. Skiing might be some people’s favourite hobby, but I have the balance of a new born faun. I’m just hoping I don’t end up on crutches.

Putting my fears into perspective, I realised that businesses face challenges where the outcomes are much more serious than mere loss of face. Managing change within any organisation is a huge task, to the extent that some organisations resource teams specifically for that purpose. I’m sure we have all been involved in organisational change at some level during our careers, whether that involved process change, restructuring or redundancy. The associated business decisions are never easy but good communication can help to make the process easier and potentially protect your business from tribunal claims in the future.

It’s important to get as much of your plan in place as you can early in the process and be transparent in communicating that to staff. A simple change in working processes may be easy to absorb, but if you’re talking about asking employees to change their role, working location or potentially lose their job altogether, there are going to be a lot of factors for them to consider and that you’ll need to address. They’ll need to know what choices are open to them, what the process will be and how long it will take. If you’re seeking information from them that will influence your decision, make your needs clear.

Clear communication is essential, both verbally and in writing. Staff who are reeling at the possibility of redundancy, learning a new job or facing a longer commute will not take in everything that you say immediately. The key information needs to be written down so that they can absorb it later. Having a named contact person for queries is easy to overlook but is important in providing certainty.

Your idea of what represents essential information may differ from your employees so be prepared for questions, but also try to consider what will be important from their perspective. If their day to day work is going to change, what training are you going to offer? What compensation will be available to those being made redundant and how will you decide who goes when the number of people performing a specific role needs to be reduced? Social factors can also be enormously important. Are you going to help employees move house if they need to, or offer help with increased commuting costs? The prospect of integrating into a new team or office can be nerve-wracking, so devising strategies to ease that process and making sure staff are aware of them could be the difference between retaining an employee and losing them.

It’s also important to remember that the communication doesn’t end once the changes have been made. Those who are in new roles or left in a job after others have been made redundant can feel the after effects for some time. Keeping the lines of communication open helps everyone adjust.

For now, I’m off to look at my challenge list again. Can anyone tell me anything about sheep?

\* For anyone interested in seeing the full list, it’s [here](http://www.kirstyfrancewrites.co.uk/40-for-40/). If you can help me out with any of them I’d love to hear from you.