Developing Adaptability as a Manager

1. Recognize that unforeseen circumstances beyond anyone’s control could change everything and force plans to be altered. Every circumstance cannot be predicted.

2. Here are Strategies for Adaptability:
   a. Rethink planning. Consider using a quarterly versus annual planning cycle, which can aid in responding quickly, and adapt approaches to changing circumstances.
   b. Gather input and insights from all team members, who understand the frontline realities, during project planning or change processes.
   c. Build flexibility in the schedule. Remember unexpected events can occur, and since they may not be able to be planned for, build time to react to such events into the schedule. In other words, plan for uncertainty.

3. Consider these ideas while Planning for Growth:
   a. Systematize early. Take the time at the beginning to formally create a living document regarding processes, which can be shared repeatedly and updated as circumstances dictate.
   b. Examine similar examples of growth. Consider best practices and put them into place. Learn from others mistakes as well.
   c. Create a positive culture that will sustain growth. Be deliberate about the behaviors and traits that should be exhibited and embraced.

4. Here are ways to Navigate Leadership and Influencers:
   a. Don’t align too closely with any one leader. Develop an identity beyond that leader or sponsor. Connect broadly with other leaders and key people throughout. Understand who the real decision makers and influencers are. Who do the top leaders listen to and trust?
   b. Cultivate relationships with hidden influencers. Start small and work to build relationships and trust over time.
   c. Become more aware of the relationships and dynamics operating in the vicinity to understand what’s happening and adapt accordingly as a manager.

5. Master the art of giving continuous feedback, and receiving it as well. Invite feedback from the team. This shows an interest in hearing their thoughts and personal preferences, which can aid in growth for the team and manager.

6. Create a personalized learning path for professional growth and development.
   a. Know where you want to go. Pre-write a resume as though it were five years in the future noting what jobs and skills will be needed to ensure qualifications for the future leadership role.
   b. Build T-shaped skills. That is, develop deep domain expertise in one area and breadth in adjacent areas.
   c. Focus. Identify one new skill per year to work on, as slow, incremental progress can be transformative over time.
7. Master contingency planning. It is useful to plan out alternative backup scenarios to aid in response should the circumstances change. Here’s how to plan for change:
   a. Write down expected outcomes. This can help to objectively evaluate the plan later and test initial thoughts.
   b. Identify possible outcomes. Recognize that the unexpected may happen and identify some of the more likely possibilities. Explore these if/then scenarios for these eventualities just in case, which can help deal with such realities faster should they arise.
   c. Take action to prevent crises. Considering possible scenarios allows for thinking of steps to avoid such scenarios all together.

8. Promoting adaptability on teams. Recognize that fear hinders innovation. Create a safe space for team risk-taking.
   a. Distinguish a failure of outcome from a failure of process.
   b. Publicly reward employees who disclose failures or problems right away, which instills trust in sharing honest information.
   c. Share personal failures with honesty, which gives others permission to talk about their mistakes and that being imperfect is not a disqualification for leadership.

9. Adapting for Individuals – Treating them with dignity and respect.
   a. Find the right style of providing feedback.
   b. Discover what worked for employees in the past regarding positive or productive experiences with other managers.
   c. Determine how much structure a given employees needs to succeed.

10. As an adaptable manager, stay curious, avoid making assumptions, and seek to ask the right questions. These tips can help to stay curious longer:
    a. Avoid jumping to solutions and trying to resolve problems too quickly. It often takes more time to fully understand the situation and things can be made worse when assumptions are made about the facts and all the possible alternatives are failed to be considered.
    b. Pay attention and survey each step. Ask at least five questions and actively listen to understand the full context of what is going on.
    c. Explore alternative answers before settling on one. Thoughtfully examine other possibilities to determine what is best for the situation.
    d. Gather insight and opinions from employees. Depending on the situation, they may be in a better position to identify solutions to a problem or notice emerging trends.

11. Consider these strategies to predict likely scenarios, yet also deal with unlikely scenarios, change, and ambiguous situations. Set the tone and tenor for the team to do the same.