

# QUICK TAKES ON RESISTANCE

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## CHANGING AND STAYING THE SAME

### **Why People Change**

The reason people change is to preserve something even more important.<sup>1</sup>

Before people will change, they need to know the answers to three questions:

- Am I able to do it?
- What will happen?
- Do I want that?

People are more likely to change when they are involved in deciding how to change.

People change for *their* reasons, not *yours*.

### **Why People Don't Change**

It's not *change* that people resist, it's *loss*.<sup>2</sup>

People know that when they first try something new, they will be less effective before they become more effective. Think of a child learning to walk, or learning to ride a bicycle. How can you make this transition safer for them?

People will not change anything if they believe they would have to give up something that is even more important.

It is natural for people to push back on change.

Resistance often comes from social reasons, not technical ones. People want to know, "How will I be judged? What will happen to my competence? To my power?"

People don't like to be surprised. You're probably thinking, "I already knew that."

Your change will create uncertainty for people, and therefore risk.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald M. Weinberg. Personal communication.

<sup>2</sup> William Bridges. *Managing Transitions*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991. ISBN: 0-201-55073-3.

## **Your Experience of Change**

Think of some times someone asked you to change, and you didn't. What led you not to change?

Think of some times someone asked you to change, and you did. What led you to change?

What were the differences between the times when you changed and the times when you didn't? What can you learn from this about how others may be responding to your ideas?

What increases *your* resistance? What reduces it?

## **Implications for Change Agents**

Whoever wants something from an interaction assumes responsibility for creating the environment which produces success. <sup>3</sup>

If you want something different to happen, you're going to have to do something different.

Be willing to change yourself.

The Broccoli Principle: It doesn't matter how healthy it is if they won't eat it.

## **PREPARING**

### **Preparing the Relationship**

Your first priority is to create a positive relationship with the people you are asking to change.

If you lose contact, your first priority is to regain it.

There is at least one thing you can always have in common with anyone: their best interest. <sup>4</sup>

When you're trying to make change happen, you need the support of the people you are asking to change. And they need your support.

No matter what else people want, they always want support. <sup>5</sup>

If someone's resistance can seriously impede your change, then that person's support will be a great asset.

Who are you trying to help by making this change? Did they ask for your help?

Do you like the people you are asking to change? Do you respect them? Do you trust them?

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<sup>3</sup> Sharon Drew Morgen. *Sales on the Line*. Portland, OR: Metamorphous Press, 1993. ISBN: 1-55552-047-2.

<sup>4</sup> Charlie Seashore. Personal communication.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald M. Weinberg. Personal communication.

Do the people you are asking to change like you? Do they respect you? Do they trust you?

### **Preparing Your Change**

Respect the status quo. It works, at least for some people, to some extent, in some ways.

Before you make a change, ask "What do we want to make sure not to change?" <sup>6</sup>

Don't ask people to change something they can't control. <sup>7</sup>

Take care to frame the need for change so that it doesn't imply people are incompetent or have failed.

What might go wrong if you make this change? If you can't think of at least three ways it might go wrong, think some more. <sup>8</sup>

What doubts do you have about the change you are recommending? You do have at least a few small doubts, don't you?

Involve people in designing the change:

- Those who will be affected.
- Those who have significant, relevant information.
- Those who have relevant authority.

### **Preparing Yourself**

See your proposal as a possibility, not a necessity.

It is unlikely that you can get significant improvement by changing something no-one cares about.

How important is this change to you? What makes it so important to you? How might that affect the kind of responses you get? How might it affect your view of the responses?

Don't try harder. Try softer. <sup>9</sup>

### **Preparing the Environment**

Create an environment where people want to change, and where it is possible to change. <sup>10</sup>

What support are you counting on from the environment in which the change will happen? What do you need to do to ensure that support?

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<sup>6</sup> Gerald M. Weinberg. *The Secrets of Consulting*. New York: Dorset House, 1985. ISBN: 0-932633-01-3.

<sup>7</sup> Gerald M. Weinberg. Personal communication.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald M. Weinberg. *The Secrets of Consulting*.

<sup>9</sup> Kathy Peterman. Personal communication.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald M. Weinberg. Personal communication.

Make sure the environment protects people against:

- Punishment for failure.
- Feelings of incompetence.
- Poor results.

Stay in touch with the environment in which the change will be made.

### **Anticipating the Response**

Under what circumstance can you expect resistance? Any time you propose a change.

Role play the change to reveal possible responses.

Who stands to lose something from this change?

If everyone immediately agrees to your change, there's something seriously wrong.

When was the last time a significant change you made was as easy as you thought it would be?

You don't always do what you think you ought to do. So why would you expect others to do what you think *they* ought to do?

People don't yet have any positive experience with the new way.

Expect different people to respond differently.

Organizational change happens one person at a time.

Everything that could possibly allow continuing the status quo will happen. <sup>11</sup>

## **THE RESPONSE**

### **Encouraging the Response**

Make sure it is safe for people to express their disagreements and concerns.

Encourage people to express their disagreement and concerns early.

### **Examining Your Model of Resistance**

Your internal model of "resistance" is the most important factor influencing how much resistance you get.

Whenever you get resistance, examine and adapt your model of change.

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<sup>11</sup> Charlie Seashore. Personal communication.

Labeling someone's response resistance is a way of resisting the response.

What about the response leads you to call it resistance?

What about you leads you to call the response resistance?

What about the change you're recommending leads you to call the response resistance?

What about the relationship with the person leads you to call the response resistance?

How do you respond internally to other people's resistance? How do you respond externally?

Which of the ideas in this paper do you disagree with? What is your internal response? What can you learn from this about how others may be responding to your ideas?

### **Reframing Resistance**

Resistance is the external word. The internal word is safety.<sup>12</sup>

Resistance is a word that stops conversation.

Whenever you are tempted to say "they are resisting," try these possibilities on for size:

- I don't understand their point of view... yet.
- They did something I didn't expect.
- They did something I didn't want them to do.
- What they did doesn't fit into my model of how change happens.
- Either I know something they don't know, or they know something I don't know.
- Maybe I've made a mistake.
- I've created a problem for them.
- I'm asking them to do something that feels unsafe.
- I've lost contact with them.

A sure-fire way to avoid resistance: stop asking people to change.

Another sure-fire way to avoid resistance: stop labeling people's responses resistance.

It's not resistance, it's just a response.

Whatever else it is, the response is information.

It tells you about what needs to happen for you to get the results you want.

Would you want me to overcome *your* resistance?

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<sup>12</sup> Gerald M. Weinberg. Personal communication.

## **From Resistance to Curiosity**

When you encounter resistance, in order to make progress, you must work to understand the other person's point of view.

Resistance is a signal to become curious. Start by thinking, "Hmmm. Isn't that interesting?"

Seek first to understand.<sup>13</sup>

## **GETTING CURIOUS**

### **Sources of Information**

The best source of information about a person's response is the other person.

A second best source of information is your own experience and imagination, *but make sure to check it out.*

### **Intake**

Describe the response in terms of the five senses. What did you see, hear, smell, feel, and taste?

### **Meaning**

What exactly is the person responding to?

- Something about your change?
- Something about the way you described the change?
- Something about your relationship?
- Something about their working environment?
- Something from their own experience?
- Earlier, failed changes?

What else might the person be responding to? How can you find out?

Think of at least three ways to interpret the response.<sup>14</sup> What interpretation is most likely? How can you find out what the person intended?

Miller's Law: Assume that what the person says is true, and try to imagine what it could be true of.<sup>15</sup>

- In what sort of world would it be true?
- Under what circumstances would it be true?
- What else would have to be true if the person's words are not false and outrageous and ridiculous?

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen R. Covey. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York: Fireside/Simon& Schuster, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Gerald M. Weinberg. *Quality Software Management, Volume 2: First-Order Measurement*. New York: Dorset House, 1993. ISBN: 0-932633-24-2.

<sup>15</sup> Suzette Haden Elgin. *BusinessSpeak*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995. ISBN: 0-07-020000-9.

What does the response tell you...

- About the person's beliefs?
- About what is important to the person?
- About your change?
- About the way you described your change?
- About your relationship with the person?
- About the person's working environment?

Resistance tells you about some support you need but don't yet have.

People will watch your response to resistance, to find out whether you are making it safe for them to express their concerns.

What information is missing from the responses you're getting? How can you get that information?

What is ambiguous in the person's response? How can you get more specific information?

Notice what *doesn't* get resisted.<sup>16</sup>

### **Significance**

The size of a person's response tells you about the significance they place in the change.

Don't take it personally.

### **Judging Other People's Behavior**

Don't make someone have to be wrong in order to accept your change.

We tend to judge others by their behavior, and ourselves by our intentions.<sup>17</sup> Turn this around. What might the other person's intentions be? How might they be viewing your behavior?

Every behavior has a positive intention.

No matter how it looks, everyone is trying to be helpful.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Dan Starr. Personal communication.

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Ross. Personal communication.

<sup>18</sup> Gerald M. Weinberg. *Quality Software Management, Volume 3: Congruent Action*. New York: Dorset House, 1994. ISBN: 0-932633-28-5.