

Change or die: Partnering with resistance

An age-old problem we all have is that we know what to do, but we just don't do it. We have this same issue with other people for whom we are responsible, be they direct reports, colleagues, other employees or even consultants like myself. So why do people resist what we want them to do? We know what we *should* do to make our lives different—diet, exercise, save money, stop smoking. Yet we resist change, often at almost any cost.

In my many years of experience, no one has ever come to me before a problem has gotten out of hand and reached the crisis stage. We only seek the help of others when there are guns to our heads. Does our sense of American rugged individualism prevent us from asking for the assistance of others?

Why do we resist change? Is it our fear of loss of control, our increased sense of vulnerability, or our lack of commitment to our own growth? Human beings are creatures of habit. We continue to be attracted to the old, to what we know. To repeat the

behaviors that previously paid off continues despite little gain.

All of us are locked in paradigms, certain mind-sets. A paradigm is a fixed mental set to describe what is possible and what isn't. This set of beliefs, attitudes, expectations and assumptions determines how we construct our personal reality. And beware if any one tries to mess with it! A paradigm is the foundation of resistance.

History has demonstrated at certain points in time massive shifts in how people view reality. Columbus' voyage to the New World was based on the outrageous belief that the world wasn't flat. Before Columbus, it was common knowledge that if you sailed too far west from Europe you would fall off the Earth. Until the mid-1950s, any one who was serious about flying into outer space was considered a lunatic.

Allegiance to old beliefs causes massive resistance. Tremendous conflict con-

times until a paradigm shift occurs. A paradigm shift occurs when it becomes too uncomfortable for you to hold onto an outdated belief. The old mind-set doesn't work anymore. Thinking in the old way leads to dysfunction.

The massive resistance to corporate downsizing, computerization of our daily lives, and the emergence of the service economy has provided problems of crisis proportion. All of these changes we strongly resisted. None of us wanted to accept these changes. We finally agreed to these changes only because not to would have caused too much discomfort. At the crisis stage, it hurts too much not to ask for help.

Changing mind-sets in business is crucial. It's vital that employees do what we want them to do. Ironically, we can't make them do anything. Therefore, we must learn to partner with their resistance. Here's how:

- Don't take resistance personally. Your employee is struggling with a difficult reality, not you.
- Fighting resistance just increases it.
- Most resistance is fueled by the fear of

loss of control.

■ Encourage the feelings behind the resistance. Feelings pass and change when expressed.

■ You can't force anyone to change his or her mind-set. You can, however, remove the roadblocks preventing a different approach.

Resistance is the employee's natural, healthy struggle to incorporate a new way of looking at a problem. BE PATIENT! Change takes trial and error, endless repetition and time. In the marketplace—just as in biology, when you stop changing, you die! **SEN**

PERSONNEL



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