

Responding to Resistance

Adapted from: "Understanding Resistance" from Flawless Consulting by Peter Block

Resistance is a necessary and natural stage of all processes of change. In order to successfully handle resistance when it happens, we need to be able to:

- **Recognize and identify the resistance**
- **Support the complete and direct expression of resistance**
- **Address the resistance appropriately**

SOME COMMON TYPES OF RESISTANCE ARE:

- **Need too much detail:** some resistance can appear in the form of requests for additional detail related to the topic or statements made. When requests for more information appear to block discussion or a decision, this could be resistance rather than a need for more detail.
- **Give too much detail:** rather than requesting details some offer too much. This can also block discussion and decisions when members are derailed by detailed stories or explanations of events rather than focusing on the topic at hand.
- **Not enough time:** members may resist participating in a consensus process because time is of the essence. While time limitations are often the reality, a preoccupation with the limitation can be resistance to the process for some other reason.
- **Impracticality:** members may feel consensus is not a "real-world" answer or approach to problem-solving or decision-making. Those who say "people can't reach consensus in the real world, it doesn't work that way" may have deeper reasons for not wanting to move forward with the process.
- **Confusion:** similar to needing too much detail, sometimes a persistent inability to understand an opinion or proposal before the group can be a way to block the process.
- **Silence:** perhaps the most difficult resistance to identify or address, silence among members can mean the process is not working. Consensus is total participation by every member and silence can be a refusal to participate and block the process altogether. Remember: silence does not imply agreement.



- **Moralizing:** when discussing the opinions of others, especially controversial topics, members may feel the need to explain or describe to one another a “better” way to think or what members “should be thinking” or “need to understand.” This form of resistance can offend and stifle others. Often it indicates the moralizers are uncomfortable because others disagree with them.
- **Push for solutions:** when proposals are before the group, some resistance can emerge as claims of impossibility or demands for “more tangible solutions” rather than ideas. If members disrupt decision making with a discussion about the impossibility of a proposal, this resistance may be more about what members are unwilling to do rather than what cannot be done.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dealing with resistance primarily requires allowing, supporting, and acknowledging the complete expression of the resistance. Often this alone can diminish the resistance. In other cases, when resistance is blocking the process or the decision of the group, there are effective ways to address it.

- **Identify the form the resistance has taken.**
- **Name the form it has taken using neutral language.**
- **Be quiet and listen to the response.**

FOR EXAMPLE:

RESISTANCE:	LOOK FOR:	SAY:
Giving too much detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaning forward • Interrupting others 	“What is most important for you to express?”
Confusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furrowed brows • Shaking heads 	“Is your confusion about the topic or the process?”
Silence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Folded arms • Leaning backward 	“We need your opinion. Can you share what you are thinking?”
Press for solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impatience • Exasperation 	“Can we discuss the ideas first?”
Moralizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pointing fingers • Shaking heads 	“We feel we understand your opinion. Do you feel you understand others?”



Resolving Misunderstandings

If you think a misunderstanding has occurred in your work with the community, or if you feel there is a challenge to establishing trust, talk to your community contacts and ask for help.

THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS CAN IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BY ADDRESSING AND RESOLVING MANY COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS:

Verifying - “What I understand you to mean is...Is that correct?”

Aligning - “Let me look at it from your point of view.”

Probing - “Tell me more about your concerns.”

Phrasing - “How can we work it out so that...(describe your concerns and theirs)?”

Asking - “What will it take to...(describe your concerns and theirs)?”

The information revealed by using these techniques can be very enlightening and even surprising. Once the reasons behind a miscommunication are clarified, you will find it much simpler to express yourself, and to reach agreement.



Solving Problems

Solving one problem can lead to the creation of another. Avoid the temptation to “win a battle and lose the war” when identifying problems to strategically address.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Identify the problem** - break it down into component parts (what the attitudes, facts, perspectives are; when/how it happened; why it is a problem). Often what appears to be “a” problem can be several.
2. **List all viable alternatives / courses of action** - brainstorm and get everything down in as brief a form as possible. No idea should be unwelcome. Everything is an option to be weighed against consequences.
3. **List the consequences of each viable alternative** – explore what may result from each option (both good and bad). Be as specific as possible. The essence of rationality is respect for facts. Be informed.
4. **Choose a course of action** - making sure there is a plan in place to carry it out. Check-in over time to evaluate your action’s effectiveness.
5. **Record improvements to approaches, techniques, or protocols revealed** – take this opportunity to fine tune operations and increase individual and organizational capacity.

1. IDENTIFY PROBLEM	2. LIST ALL ALTERNATIVES	3. DETERMINE CONSEQUENCES	4. CHOOSE ACTION	5. SYSTEM-WIDE IMPROVEMENT
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8-Step Conflict Resolution Process

Adapted from: Resolving Conflict Without Giving In or Giving Up

STEP ONE: DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH ANGER

You can't negotiate an agreement if you and/or the other person are too angry to think straight or acknowledge your feelings.

STEP TWO: DO YOUR HOMEWORK (THINK BEFORE APPROACHING)

- How does this conflict affect each of us?
- What interests or values are at stake for each of us?
- What prejudices or assumptions do we each have?
- What approach would be best (avoid, compete, collaborate, etc.)?
- If we want to collaborate, what is the right time and place to initiate that?

STEP THREE: SET A POSITIVE TONE

- Invite the person to negotiate. For example: "Could we talk?"
- State your positive intentions. For example: "I'd like to resolve things between us."
- Acknowledge and validate the other person. For example: "I can see this is difficult for you, too."

STEP FOUR: USE GROUND RULES (STATED OR UNSTATED)

- One person speaks at a time.
- Continue until the situation is improved.
- Remain calm.



STEP FIVE: DEFINE THE PROBLEM

- One at a time, each person states his/her issues and feelings.
- Use effective listening and speaking techniques.
- Identify interests and needs.
- Discuss assumptions and values.
- Summarize new understanding and agreements reached.

STEP SIX: BRAINSTORM POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Each person contributes ideas to satisfy interests and needs.
- Don't criticize or evaluate ideas.
- Be creative.
- Use "I can" or "We could" rather than "You should" or "You need to".

STEP SEVEN: EVALUATE AND CHOOSE SOLUTIONS

- Solutions agreed upon should be mutual, realistic, specific, and balanced. Solutions must also address the main interests of both parties.

STEP EIGHT: FOLLOW UP

Check back with one another at a pre-set time and date. If the solution is not working, revisit the process.

