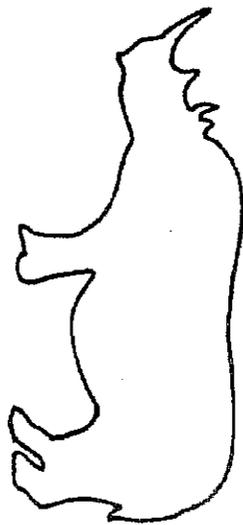


Celebrating Resistance

Mutiny! Yellow post-its were everywhere: on the backs of chairs, on the door to the men's room. "Remember!" "Let's do it."



These were secretive reminders to be disruptive in the morning session, to whisper, and to be otherwise inattentive when my copresenter (Suzanne Bailey) and I began to present. For many participants, their planned behavior of resistance went unnoticed, and for others the behavior they executed went unnoticed.

What happened? We didn't resist. Since resistance persists only within systems of resistance, the intentions of these adults to test their disruptive powers and study our reactions failed to

even get off the ground. Incidentally, we were honored by their trust and their gumption to work on such a bold experiment during our three-day workshop on *Becoming a State-of-the-Art Presenter*.

Resistance to change and learning is common. Following are some concepts and strategies drawn from the literature on psychology, hypnosis, group dynamics, and personal experience.

First, let's consider the type of system that resistance needs in order to live. Run water through the hose. Knot the hose: instant resistance. Untie the knot, and the water once again flows through its natural course.

A participant voices a complaint. We counter with logic. We knot the hose; or we paraphrase, openly listening without defensiveness, without explaining our behavior, and the water flows freely. Resistance can only exist when we resist the resistance. To bypass the resistance, break the system.

Lipsnitz, Friedman, and Omer (1989) believe that resistance is a "positive, healthy reaction that enables people to maintain stability under extremely turbulent conditions." They offer several strategies that are designed to infiltrate behind the lines, intercept new ideas, and facilitate change. The following are two of my favorites.

Assuming a One-Down Position

I don't pretend to be a better mathematics teacher than you. While my work has led to an understanding of which cognitive processes separate the high-achieving from the low-achieving student, and while I know a lot of specific ways to teach the low-achieving student some strategies that will increase his or her performance, I cannot begin to know the particular circumstances and students with whom you work. Please bear with me if I offer some things that are inappropriate; adopt those that will work for you and advise me of where I might strengthen my knowledge base.

The intent of this type of statement is to shift the focus from the presenter's expertise to the participant's expertise and to eliminate possible power struggles.

Preempting

Another prevention strategy that Lipsnitz, Friedman, and Omer (1989) offer involves anticipating a difficulty or an emotional block that participants may have in completing an assignment. The presenter foreshadows this and gives the impression that it is a normal expectation of learning and that it will serve as only a temporary and not a serious barrier. The presenter then offers tips about how to overcome it.

Some of you may notice that as you begin to incorporate these skills in your teaching, you may actually get worse before you get better. Your mind may offer compelling arguments to stop the innovation because it's interfering with your effectiveness. This is a very natural part of the process of growth—even your own admonition to quit—and will not last very long.

There are at least two things you can do to prepare for this:

- (1) be willing to live through a brief period of discomfort, and
- (2) select just a part of this new teaching technique to practice each day. Over-rehearse it until it becomes second nature.

Both strategies include principles of hypnotic suggestion pioneered by Milton Erickson. In each, the presenter has anticipated and incorporated potential resistance into the instruction. Should resistance emerge, it will feel to the participant like part of the instructions. It seems, therefore, not to be resistance at all but a form of cooperation with the presenter. To do this effectively, the presenter's language must be artfully vague, letting each participant tailor his or her own suit of understandings from the fabric of language given to all.

But even with all your skills, in some audiences there may be 1 or 2 percent of the people whose major pleasure is to see you fail. Whatever you do, they will be able to find fault. Perhaps you speak too quickly or too slowly. Perhaps your clothes clash with the color scheme of the setting. It's somewhat reassuring to know that whatever you do, you will help these people reach their goal.

Wormator, 1997

Reducing Resistance: A Summary

Goodwin Watson

Our observations on sources of resistance within persons and within institutions can be summarized in some concise principles. These are not absolute laws but are based on generalizations, which are usually true and likely to be pertinent. The recommendations are here reorganized to answer three questions: A. Who brings change? B. What kind of change succeeds? and C. How is it best done—by what procedures and in what climate?

A. Who brings change?

1. Resistance will be less if administrators, teachers, board members, and community leaders feel that the project is their own—not one devised and operated by outsiders.
2. Resistance will be less if the program clearly has wholehearted support from administrators within the system.

B. What kind of change succeeds?

3. Resistance will be less if participants see the change as reducing rather than increasing their present burdens.
4. Resistance will be less if the program agrees/matches with values and ideals which have long been acknowledged by participants.
5. Resistance will be less if the program offers the kind of new experience which interests participants.
6. Resistance will be less if participants feel that their autonomy and their security are not threatened.

C. What procedures help to instituting change?

7. Resistance will be less if participants have joined in diagnostic efforts leading them to agree on the basic problem and to feel its importance.
8. Resistance will be less if the program is adopted by consensual group decision.
9. Resistance will be reduced if proponents are able to empathize with opponents, to recognize valid objections, and to take steps to relieve unnecessary fears.
10. Resistance will be reduced if it is recognized that innovations are likely to be misunderstood and misinterpreted, and if provision is made for feedback of perceptions of the program and for further clarification as needed.
11. Resistance will be reduced if participants experience acceptance, support, trust, and confidence in their relations with one another.
12. Resistance will be reduced if the project is kept open to revision and reconsideration if experience indicates that changes would be desirable.

D. What is a healthy climate for change?

13. Readiness for change gradually becomes a characteristic of certain individuals, groups, organizations, and civilizations. They no longer look nostalgically at a Golden Age in the past but anticipate their Utopia in days to come. The spontaneity of youth is cherished and innovations are protected until they have had a chance to establish their worth. The ideal is more and more seen as possible.