

Overcoming obstacles to change

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Background...

- The **number-one** skill to have today, bar none, is the ability to change. People who are receptive to change see in it opportunities for greater happiness at work and in their personal lives.
- People have varying levels of difficulty with change. Some with only mild difficulty can read a book or take a class and they are off and running. Others have moderate difficulty and need more emotional support. For others, change is extremely difficult, and may be seemingly impossible.

There are several **recurring reasons** for resistance to change:


- The purpose of the change is not made clear.
- The participants are not involved in the planning.
- The appeal is based on personal reasons.
- The habit patterns of the work group are ignored.
- There is poor communication regarding a change.
- There is fear of failure.
- Excessive work pressure is involved.
- The cost is too high, or the reward for making the change is seen as inadequate.
- The present situation seems satisfactory.
- There is a lack of respect and trust in the change initiator.

Fullan, M. and Stiegelbauer, S. (1991). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. New York: Teachers College Press. Excerpted from *Leadership and Technology*, published by the National School Boards Association's Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education.

Types of resistance to change

- **Positive Resister:** agrees with new ideas and programs, but never moves to implement any changes
- **Unique resister:** believes each change is find for other areas but not for his or her "unique" situation
- **Let-me-be-last resister:** hopes new ideas and programs will die before his or her department must act on them
- **We-need-more-time-to study resister:** discovers that others find it hard to object to this form of resistance
- **State-rights resister:** wants not part of programs initiated elsewhere (which may even mean rejection of whatever comes from outside his or her department or outside the school system; also known as the not-invented-here syndrome)
- **Cost-justifier:** want everything cost-justified before any change
- **Incremental change resister:** wants the new program, system, or machine as long as it just adds on to everything the old one had.

From *Teachers and Technology*, published by the National School Boards Association's Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education)



What can school board members and other educational leaders do if educators and community members in their districts are resistant to change?

- Hold public forums on change.
- Provide a context for the tremendous demands on schools and the kind of continuous change that is needed.
- Look at what we want students to become as adults, work back from there.
- Build this into your systemic change activities.

Tips:

- Expect resistance.
- Explain the rationale for change.
- Choose your opening moves carefully.
- Provide a clear vision.
- Seek opportunities to involve people.
- Promise "problems".
- Over-communicate.
- Beware of bureaucracy.
- Wear your commitment on your sleeve.
- Alter the reward system to support improvement.
- Get resistance out in the open.
- Make sure people have the know-how.
- Track behavior and measure results.
- Outrun the resisters.



Taking the Fear out of Change


Ask yourself the following questions to understand and address fear of change:

- How can the school board help facilitate others in the change process?
- How does the school board facilitate those people involved in moving to technology-based teaching and learning?



According to psychologist Dennis O'Grady, the ability to change is related to a combination of five fears that O'Grady says can choke the ability to change:

- **Fear of the Unknown**—The unspoken message from society says that when change occurs, you will lose control.
- **Fear of Failure**—If I commit myself to goals for change, there is a chance for failure.
- **Fear of Commitment**—Commitment forces an answer to tough questions. "What do I really want?" Commitment to one option is not always fun because it eliminates other options.
- **Fear of Disapproval**—If I change, I risk having people say they like me better the way I was. Your own change also forces others to change in relationship to you.
- **Fear of Success**—If I change, what other demands will be made of me? Can I sustain this success?



When working with larger systems, such as school districts, force field analysis provides a useful approach to preparing for and working with resistance to change. It goes as follows:

Purpose

- Pinpoints driving and restraining forces your team will want to consider before solutions are implemented.
- Identifies solutions that allow driving forces to predominate over restraining forces.

How

- Identify a solution.
- Brainstorm restraining forces, as well as driving forces in its implementation.
- Evaluate both forces in terms of impact/changeability.
- Develop strategies to remove or decrease restraining forces, starting with the easily changed, high-impact ones.
- Develop strategies to strengthen driving forces, striving for win/win solutions.
- Translate these strategies to action plans: Who? What? When? Where? How?
- Develop plan to evaluate the effectiveness of your action plan, once implemented.

When

- Clarifying understanding of the environment in which your solution will be implemented.
- Identifying key elements that can realistically be altered.
- Developing a systematic strategy and an action plan for implementation.
- Creating criteria for evaluating solution effectiveness.