Introduction

Snatching defeat from the jaws of victory: Why does positive change so often seem negative?

"Yes, I know I should lose weight...change professions ...give up smoking...end a hopeless relationship...start working out...use the new appraisal system at work...I should, but I just can't do it right now."

Ever heard yourself saying something like this? When did you last hear someone cry out: "I don't care if the new project is a good idea, I can't go along with it." Or, "I can never forgive them for downsizing me." Maybe you suspected that when they said, "I can't support it now," they really meant, "I won't support it ever."

Such statements reflect our resistance to change. All too often, resistance to change causes us to reject the potential benefits of something new. Instead, we cling to the old, doomed way of doing things.

Example...

Jennifer suspected two of her subordinate managers of writing personally damning comments about her on an annual attitude survey. She had no proof, but she was sure she knew who made the comments. Jennifer's relationship with her co-workers was terrible. I was called in as a consultant.

After trying traditional conflict management tactics to no avail, I simply asked Jennifer if she would rather be right and cling to the past and her belief she had been done wrong. Or would she rather be happy, let go of the past, and lead her organization back to national prominence?

Without a blink, Jennifer looked me straight in the eye and said, "I like my resentment. I would rather be right."

I've been in Jennifer's shoes. And I bet you have too.

We've all been there. We've done it at home. We've done it at work. We've watched our best friends and loved ones do it. We say we won't do it next time, but we do.

When was the last time we suspected we should make a change, but refused to do it anyway?

Why are we moved to resist change, even when the change is good for us? We seem to feel as if we have an inalienable right to resist, no matter what bosses, peers, friends, and logic tell us.

> **Tips for Change Leaders**
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> *Don't be alarmed by your employees' reluctance to comply. It is perfectly natural. We all have the same reaction to some extent.*

It's as if we have a passion to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. In fact, resistance to change is so emotionally charged, so irrational, that efforts at logic are a waste of time for anyone trying to help us.

The internal voice that says "No!" to any change. Each demand for change on us is often met with a small but insistent internal voice screaming: "Not now. Not ever! I won't do it even if it's good for me." That defiant "no" sounds the same no matter what kind of change is afoot. A major cornerstone of this book holds that resistance to change in our workplace is no different from resistance to change in our personal life.

If we can acknowledge the "no" and dismiss its siren call, we can open ourselves to unlimited possibilities. Learning how to listen to that emphatic "no" and replace it with a confident "maybe" is a goal of this book.

Researchers agree: Resistance to change is the culprit. Seventy percent of all change projects fail.[1] What the existing research shows is that resistance

to change is the major reason for unsuccessful change attempts. The creators of re-engineering, Hammer and Champy[2] report how surprised they are by the amount of resistance to re-engineering.

A survey of Chief Information Officers identifies resistance to change as the most common reason re-engineering efforts fail, writes re-engineering expert Robert Boyle.[3] A survey of Fortune 500 senior executives[4] found less than half of the changes in their organizations were successful; resistance was the main reason for the failures.

Resistance to change is the primary cause behind start-up problems in programs designed to improve quality. In fact, a Zenger-Miller publication reports fewer than half of the new quality programs in organizations are successful.[5]

What's more, 75 percent of the resistance came from middle managers, and 63 percent of the resistance came from managers and supervisors, the study finds. In short, when change efforts fail, resistance is often the culprit.

The effects of resistance to change are also seen in change projects that aim to merge e-learning with the more traditional methods of training and development.[6] Eighty-five percent of employees surveyed at a large national retailer wanted to keep using traditional, instructor-led training rather than web-based training.[7]

A Forum Corporation study surveyed senior executives from 144 companies who were identified as "leaders in e-learning." Respondents pointed out internal resistance to using technology instead of face-to-face learning as one of seven unexpected barriers to e-learning.[8] Internal resistance to using technology was the only barrier related to people. The other six were technical or organizational barriers.

In discussing the downside for people building e-learning into their training programs, Hall lists natural resistance to change from users, trainers, and managers as one of three obstacles.[9] The other two are bandwidth limitations and confusion about technology.

There is an established tradition of success to draw upon. Existing scientific knowledge tells us how to make successful personal change.[10] The writings on (1) how to deal with the death of a loved one, (2) how to heal from a divorce, and (3) how to recover from chemical dependency reveal what makes a change effort successful. Almost always, the key is our ability to release our grasp on how things used to be; our ability to let go so we can focus on how to go on with our lives.

A core truth here is: All resistance to change is a personal dilemma. Whether the change concerns our work or our personal life doesn't matter. The nature of whatever we are leaving behind and moving to does not change how we experience feelings of loss and fear.

Despite the source of the pressure to change, all change carries the promise of two things: (1) the loss of some good aspects of the current situation, and (2) a future not predictable, and possibly not wanted.

Whether it's getting a new boss, a new computer system, or a new spouse, the question is the same: "Will I be able to give up the good part of my current situation for a future that may be worse?"

Within the question is our dilemma: Should we embrace the new, with its discomfort and fear along with its potential for good, or should we refuse to release the status quo and face the consequences?

All the results from scientific probes of successful change boil down to this: Positive, successful change can be realized in more than just isolated situations. It can be done anywhere people feel paralyzed by the pressure to change. No longer must people feel unable to participate in solving the problems of how to make the proposed change a desirable transition. In other words, there is hope.

Why use personal examples? Ultimately, all change is experienced as personal. Whether it's the end of a marriage or downsizing at

work, change hits home with the personal reality of an uncertain future and the loss of how things used to be. This book shows us how to capitalize on our personal experiences with change. We learn how to turn this new-found knowledge into success as a change leader at work.

> **Tips for Change Leaders**
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> *All experiences with change your employees have in their personal life provide a springboard they can use to help them with change at work.*

Throughout the book, we use both work settings and personal life to illustrate resistance. If this is a book on resistance to change in organizations, then why are personal, nonwork-related examples used? Why not use only examples of resistance to change at work? The following four reasons answer the question.

**Resistance Is Caused by Fear and Loss,
No Matter What the Setting Is.**

First: The process of resisting change is the same whether we are at work or at home. Fear is fear and loss is loss. Setting doesn't matter. Fear of an uncertain future and distress over losses caused by the change create emotion-based reluctance to let go of the status quo. We call this reluctance "resistance to change." Regardless of what the change is—layoff, promotion, divorce—fear feeds our emotional reaction. Fear drives resistance to change.

Working hand-in-hand with fear is distress over loss. For instance, I will be distressed about having to give up some good stuff I enjoy if I get divorced (e.g., a predictable routine, daily contact with my children). And I will be distressed about having to give up good stuff I enjoyed before I changed my job (e.g., a predictable income, rewarding friendships). Distress over loss also drives resistance.

Personal Examples Are Easier for Many People to Identify With.

Second: It's often easier for people to identify with personal

change situations. After all, we have a lot of personal changes to draw from. We also have a lot more information about them. They've been going on since adolescence or before. In contrast, our experience with

change in the workplace may be much shorter. It may not yield as much experience to bank on as does our experience with change in our personal life.

> **Tips for Change Leaders**
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> *Change at work and change at home both require the same tools to be a lasting success.*

For example, when we read about someone who tried to stop an undesirable habit, we can usually say: "That happened to me too." We can compare feelings and responses.

Work-related experiences may be harder to identify with. If we read about someone having trouble recovering from getting fired and we haven't experienced this, we might think: "That doesn't apply to me since I've never been fired."

Also, with personal examples, we aren't distracted by a supervisor telling us: "Stop making excuses. Get with the program."

Efforts to Manage Resistance to Personal Change Provide More Examples of Success Than Do Efforts in the Workplace.

> **Tips for Change Leaders**
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> *Be thankful that your employees have a wealth of experience with successful change in their personal lives. This ability can be used to make changes in the workplace more successful.*

Third: Personal change has a better track record for success than organizational change. We know from our personal experiences that resistance to change has both rational and emotion-based components.

We are encouraged to deal with our emotional reactions to changes in our personal life, but not to changes at work. Hence, we are apt to find more personal-life examples than work-related examples of how to handle resistance successfully.

Resistance to Personal Change and Change at Work Feels the Same to the Person Resisting.

Fourth: Here is the key idea: Our experience of that emotion-tied knot in the pit of our stomach saying—"Not no, but hell no! I can't do it, even if it *is* good for me"—feels the same in both personal and work life. When we feel pressure to change, a part of us says "no" regardless of situation or reason. Such is the nature of resistance to change.

Is resistance to change the only reason change projects fail? Change projects fail for a myriad of reasons; many have nothing to do with resistance to change. One cause of failed change is opposition. Opposition is often confused with resistance to change, although it is quite different.

Opposition to Change versus Resistance to Change.

Resistance to change targets each employee's decision to contribute to the success of the change project and asks the question: Will the employee do his or her part to make the change a success? This is often referred to as the "people problems" of change.

Opposition to change marshals forces that are unrelated to each employee's decision to contribute to the success of the project. Opposition asks the question: "What forces within the organization and in its business environment provide roadblocks to the success of this change project?" These forces reflect the organizational and environmental problems that must be faced.

> **Tips for Change Leaders**
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> *Opposition to change occurs* **between** *people,* **between** *groups of people, and* **between** *organizations. Resistance to change occurs* **within** *your individual employees.*

A change project requires us to contribute our part to its overall success. Our part may be small, such as using new online forms needed to launch a new performance management system.

Or our part may be large, such as making basic alterations in how we work with our employees as identified in a 360° leadership development survey-feedback program. In either case the change project isn't successful unless we individually and collectively perform our given part effectively. To choose not to make that contribution signals resistance to change.

> **Tips for Change Leaders**
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> *Resistance to change has personal solutions unique to each of your employees. Opposition to change has organizational solutions unique to the company.*

Opposition to change deals with all remaining forces lined up against making the change successful. Opposition may come from within the organization. Examples include poor financial resources, incomplete or inaccurate information, competing political factions, inadequate technology, reward systems that don't support the new way of doing things, conflict between departments or other influential groups, lack of top management support.

A strong opposition source is an organizational culture that values the status quo; thus it produces strategy and training designed to maintain the status quo.

Opposition to change may come from outside the organization. Examples include competitors, the economy, political pressures, government regulations, and new technologies.

A Sailing Metaphor.

To use a sailing metaphor, a change project's success can be threatened by three categories of force working against the change.

- Category 1. *Problems in planning the trip*. This challenge includes determining the destination and accumulating the necessary resources. The effort may involve a poor diagnosis of the problem the change is supposed to fix. It may also include people who do not want you to take the journey.

- Category 2. *Problems in setting sail.* There comes a point in all change efforts where we must jump in and get started. Suddenly, those of us responsible for making the change a success get cold feet. We are faced with a personal dilemma—our fear and distress of jumping off into the unknown and giving up the comfort and security of how things have always been. We don't want to leave the port of Status Quo.
- Category 3. *Problems faced while navigating to the planned destination.* We start but never get there. We might be thrown off course by competitors, the market, the economy. Losing our way might also be caused by people who do not want us to reach our destination.

Categories 1 and 3 are concerned with problems and issues external to the individual—problems and issues we must decide how to handle. These obstacles may surface either as direct opposition to the change or as backdrops that influence our success.

Category 2 deals with resistance to change. Resistance to change and reluctance to set sail are synonymous. Resistance to change deals with our unwillingness to let go of how things are

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>
> *Resistance to change is about reluctance to set sail. Change management is about planning change before we hoist sail and navigating change after we have set sail.*

and embark on something new. The essence of dissolving resistance to change lies in the process of embarking. Category 2 is concerned with problems and issues internal to our participation. These issues influence our decision to commit ourselves to set sail and carry out the change effort.

This book does not address the issues of planning or navigating a change. Those issues have been the subject of much research and scrutiny over the last five decades.[11] As a result, much is known about how to diagnose situations that need changing, how to choose appro-

priate change programs, and how to plan and carry out the administrative and technical details. In addition, we can identify and plan for such major external influences of the economy, our market and competitors, as well as internal political forces.

In contrast, resistance to change is still a major source of failure for change projects. Resistance has not been well understood until now.

The Bottom Line: Resistance Will Kill the Change Even If Opposition Is Resolved.

If all the sources of opposition are resolved, but the organization's employees (from top to bottom) still do not do their part, the change initiative will fail. Dealing with opposition is a necessary but not sufficient condition in itself to deliver successful change. Dissolving resistance to change is also necessary.

A note on our reading plan.

It's tempting to skip to chapter 9, which describes how to talk with employees to help them reduce their resistance to a change they are facing. Feel free to do so.

However, before engaging someone in that discussion, read the earlier chapters to fully understand what the discussion guide means. Also why it works, and what it is we are trying to achieve when we engage others in each of the topics.

Not until we're armed with this knowledge can we be productive. By following the book's step-by-step process, we can correctly take detours dictated by the specifics of the situation when we're helping another who is withholding his support for a change.

So, where do we begin?

Why doesn't resistance to change simply present change leaders with a straight-forward problem to solve? Why does logic-based problem solving often fail when we try to end resistance to change? The answers are the topic of chapter 1.