

Preface

“Me? Change? Not now. Not ever!”

Do we say this out loud? Rarely.

Do we say it to ourselves? Hardly ever.

Do we say it with our actions? Yes...sometimes many times a day.

We tell others how much we like change. Just ask anyone if they think change is good. They usually give some version of the party line: “Of course change is good. I love change. It is the lifeblood of existence. Not to change is not to grow and be the best we can be.”

However, as Peter Block,¹ the internationally respected organizational consultant, insightfully notes: “If change is so good, why don't you go first?”

If “Me? Change? Not now. Not ever!” were simply a private conversation we have with ourselves without consequences, then it would be unimportant to our life at work. But it is not. It does have consequences. Our talk with ourselves urges us to hold our course, make no deviations. Our reluctance to let go of the status quo is the Achilles' heel for all efforts to make positive change both in the workplace and in our private lives.

For five decades executives, managers, academics, researchers, and consultants have worked on the problem under the label of “overcoming resistance to change.” They have done a good job of examining resistance to change as a logical reaction to feeling pressure to change. Many of their strategies for addressing Logic-Based Resistance are included in this book.

However, resistance to change has more to it than just Logic-Based Resistance. It has a twin, an emotion-based component. It's called Emotion-Based Resistance. It's easy to observe. Just listen to a friend

who smokes explain why giving up smoking is not the thing for him to do. The emotion-based side of resistance has been mostly ignored or misunderstood by all parties involved.

Often resistance is dismissed as a necessary evil of organizational life. “It’s just human nature to resist change,” the practitioners claim. But the implication that follows is that there is nothing we can do about it. The result? A 70 percent failure rate for change projects in organizations. Another outcome is a disconnect between who we are and what we do. Such separation can shatter our integrity.

This book redresses this oversight and puts successful change within the reach of everyone. It opens the black-box of Emotion-Based Resistance to the light of awareness. It reveals how to contribute positively to a change while maintaining our personal integrity. It describes the specifics of attitude change that organizations must make toward resistance—including new role expectations for managers and leaders—if they are to create a healthy stage for managing change. It also unscrambles the frustrating, and often frightening, riddle of how to help employees dissolve their resistance to a positive change in your organization—a change you may be responsible for leading.

I respectfully invite you to suspend your attachment to conventional notions of resistance to change. Let go and entertain the possibility that resistance to change is neither an unmanageable quirk of human nature nor the private domain of shrinks.

Resistance is a given fact of organizational life, I agree. However, resistance is not a necessary evil. It is just another source of well-intentioned energy waiting to be applied in our daily existence. Resistance to change, including the emotion-based type, can be understood and managed by normal people just like you and me.

That’s the goal of this book, to show you how to understand resistance and how to dissolve it. I hope you’ll find this new insight as exciting as I have.