



Handling Resistance

- What:** This tool provides you with steps for successfully handling resistance and helping people move beyond resistance and start to adjust to change.
- Why:** Resistance is a natural part of the change process. It is natural for people to resist events that may disrupt their lives, even if the change is for positive reasons. While there are a number of strategies you can take to reduce it (see Appendix *Tips for Reducing Resistance*), effective change leaders must be able to recognize signs of, and help others deal constructively with resistance in order to move to supportive behaviours during the change process.
- When:** You will need to handle resistance throughout the change process and it is **particularly** important and can be demanding of your time and skills at the initial stages of the change process.
- How:** Handling resistance requires the ability to:
- Recognize the signs of resistance (See *Understanding People's Response to Change*)
 - View resistance as a natural part of the change process
 - Listen and react non-defensively

These abilities form the foundation of the 5 steps that will help you handle resistance:

- 1) Acknowledge to yourself that you are encountering resistance
- 2) Describe what you see, hear and feel
- 3) Stay silent and let the other person or people respond
- 4) Listen attentively
- 5) Work together to develop plans to deal with concerns, fears and losses

- 1) Acknowledge to yourself that you are encountering resistance**
Ask yourself “what am I hearing and seeing?” (See *Understanding People’s Response to Change*)

Who may be showing signs of resistance?

- 2) Describe what you see, hear and feel**
- Using non-judgmental words and without using the word resistance, describe the behaviour (ie. what you are seeing, hearing and feeling):

- 3) Stay silent and let the other person or people respond**
- Ask people what they think is happening
 - Ask what the fears, feelings and concerns are
 - Assure the person or people that they will not be attacked, punished or judged

- 4) Listen attentively**
- Use active listening skills
 - Acknowledge people’s feelings and concerns
 - Respond to questions and concerns

TIP: Remember to record concerns and questions you cannot respond to or answer and tell people when they can expect a response.

- 5) Work together to develop plans to deal with concerns, fears and losses**

TIPS: Keep in mind that the idea is not to eliminate all resistance. This is not possible. Instead focus on reducing needless resistance enough to allow the change to continue to progress.

- It is not necessary that the person like the change and abandon all resistance. It is enough that the person is willing to agree work with you and to begin to accept the change.
- Differentiate between authentic resistance and "false" resistance. False resistance, while real, has nothing to do with the change. Instead it is usually rooted in old grudges, resentment of authority

or need for attention. Asking people to be specific about what the objections are, will help you distinguish between the what is authentic and what is false.

Appendix - Tips for Reducing Resistance

While resistance is a natural reaction to change, there are a number of strategies and actions you can take to reduce the level of resistance. These include:

- ⇒ To reduce the element of surprise, try to provide people with information about the change before it happens.
- ⇒ Involve people early in planning the change process to secure greater understanding and commitment to the change initiative.
- ⇒ Ask people what types of support and information would help them deal with the change.
- ⇒ Let people know about the types of support you will provide to help them deal with the change. (IE. information, additional resources, training, and counselling.)
- ⇒ Work with those affected by change to determine ways to minimize the disruption change will cause to people's lives. Be open to the ideas other's may have to reduce disruption.
- ⇒ Give people the chance to develop confidence in their abilities by encouraging them to practice new skills and behaviours that may be required because of the change.
- ⇒ Work with those who embrace the change during the early stages of your project and they will help you engage others in the change process.
- ⇒ Recognize actions, skills and behaviours that support change.
- ⇒ Keep people informed throughout the change process. Communication must be constant.
- ⇒ Try to keep the number of changes to a level that people can handle.