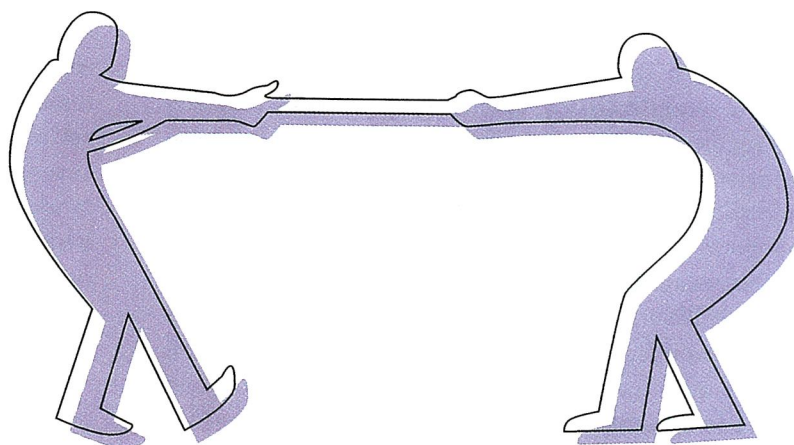


Don't Resist Resistance:

Embracing Resistance as the Hard Work of CHANGE

Ted Dunn, Ph.D.



The purpose of this article is to assist those of us who participate in groups, and religious communities, in particular, to better understand and work with the phenomenon of resistance. I would like to *normalize* resistance as a natural concomitant to any change process and reframe it as something we should welcome, rather than resist for the annoyance that it is. I wish to focus upon the dynamics of change and its alter ego, resistance, in order to assist leadership teams, planners, facilitators and participants of meetings to understand better and work effectively with resistance when it occurs. I also hope to draw the distinction between *group process* and the dynamics of resistance and the *persons* who are part and parcel of these dynamics, yet are too often labeled as the “problem.”

OUR PROPENSITY TO RESIST RESISTANCE

As a consultant working with leadership teams, and as a facilitator of assemblies and meetings, I am often met with the expectation that I am to “manage” potential resistance that may be encountered in a meeting or an assembly. Leadership teams and committees work long and hard planning processes to assist groups in accomplishing their goals. When the meeting day arrives, they understandably want to accomplish what they have spent weeks and months planning.

Planning committees, leadership teams and, sometimes, facilitators have a tendency to view resistance as the enemy of change and treat it as such.

Consequently, planners do not want people who may be resistant to their goals or process to disrupt the meeting by “hijacking” the agenda or “derailing” the process. They do not want the larger group (or themselves) to be threatened by people who sometimes express their resistance with outbursts of anger or disruptive remarks. They do not want a vocal minority dominating an otherwise cooperative, albeit less vocal majority. And, quite naturally, they do not want the goodwill of an assembly and its desired outcomes for change to be undermined or sabotaged.

Planning committees, leadership teams and, sometimes, facilitators have a tendency to view resistance as the enemy of change and treat it as such. They are loath to address resistance, or the people who express it, in a forthright and direct manner. When leadership teams and committees are asked to share their reasons for this, their stories are replete with examples where resistance, and the people who expressed it, destroyed forward progress, if not the people involved. They will recount experiences in which facilitators failed to help them work through these challenging moments in an assembly and, as a result, people were hurt. Past encounters with resistance have resulted in people being wounded by irresponsible expressions of anger and poorly managed conflicts. It is not surprising, then, that many people are frightened of resistance and do not want to repeat destructive experiences.

Leadership teams and planning committees may intellectually appreciate the possibility that those who resist might have “something” to offer, but their experience tells them not to touch it; it is too dangerous and not worth the risk. Given their experience, there is a strong tendency to create processes that are neat and tidy and to navigate these processes with the least possible diversion, lest the forces of resistance take hold. Meeting participants are also appreciative of such smooth and conflict-free processes, as they, too, have an aversion to encountering frustrating, tedious or threatening interactions. Unfortunately, attempting to

create processes that will avoid resistance simply does not work and carries its own set of risks.

Though it is understandable that planners often want a facilitator to quell, control or coerce resistant individuals into cooperating, it is not always possible or prudent. While the aversion to dealing with resistance makes sense, taking the path of least resistance is not always the wise path to take, especially when the stakes are high and the goals being pursued are substantive. In fact, while it may seem counterintuitive, the path to more successful and solid change is actually one that embraces resistance rather than avoids or prevents it.

Rather than viewing resistance as the archenemy of change and a disruption to group process, I believe that working with resistance is the essence of working toward change and is, thus, a critical element to address within any group process. Resistance is the very grist for the task of *working through* change. Working through resistance is an important way in which substantive change occurs and, if we are fortunate, how conversion takes place as well.

CONSEQUENCES OF AVOIDING RESISTANCE

While the aversion to resistance makes sense, the consequences of avoiding it are more subtle and costly than one might assume. If “peace at any price” is the unspoken norm going into an assembly or meeting, and if the path of least resistance is, indeed, the one chosen, what might be the gains, and what are the costs? The gains seem rather clear. The meeting, from the perspective of most participants, will *appear* successful if you remain unwaveringly faithful to the planned process, accomplish the goals in a timely and efficient manner and are undeterred by would-be resisters. If the *majority rules* on the decisions at hand, then no doubt the majority will congratulate you. If the process goes smoothly and you avert any potential conflict, then most participants will be appreciative of the mess-free, stress-free meeting.

However, what appears to be a smooth process or successful outcome often belies the fact that whatever conflicts, differences or pain that exists in the room has likely been driven underground (i.e., into the hallway or behind closed doors). Differences, if unattended to, don’t just vanish. People whose voices are not invited, respected or incorporated don’t just take this lying down. Their reactions to this will fester, and the dynamics, if not attended to directly, will go under-

ground and grow stronger.

The majority may *win* because they achieve their goals, but by what means and to what end? If, by contrast, the minority *loses* because they are stifled, and their offerings are dismissed as “tangential” or “inappropriate,” then where is the group, really? How successful is a meeting if the goals are accomplished at the expense of some relationships? How will decisions that are made be *owned* if the efforts in making them merely skim the surface in order to avoid conflict, and not everyone’s voice is invited to the microphones? Where does resistance go if the need to *appear* harmonious overrides and disallows its expression?

These are the types of questions that most of us do not want to be asked because the answers make us uncomfortable. Though the wounds of past failed efforts in addressing resistance remain in the memories of most leadership teams, participants, planners and facilitators, the answer is not to avoid it. The answer is to view resistance as a normal and important part of any change process. Further, the answer is to understand resistance as a partner and not as an adversary of change. The task is to develop skills of working with resistance rather than crumbling in the face of it. The discipline required is that of avoiding urges to make expedient decisions in the name of peace, while forfeiting substantive understanding, explanation and ownership of the implications and implementation. The challenge is to stay in the struggle long enough, and to probe the differences well enough, so the group makes solid decisions rather than building a house of cards. Perhaps the primary challenge is to find ways to create win-win solutions rather than win-lose decisions that ultimately come back to haunt everyone.

With this invitation to welcome resistance as a crucial ingredient for change, I would like to examine the nature of resistance and suggest some ways to work with it. What follows are five approaches to aid in your efforts to work more constructively with resistance:

- Understand resistance as a natural and necessary group dynamic, rather than as a problem or an anomaly. Expect it, invite it, and work with it as an ally, not as the enemy of a change process.
- Rather than focusing upon individuals who may have emotional difficulties, strident personalities or poor communications skills as being the problem in a group, it is more constructive to view their voices as part and parcel of a system. It is more constructive to

While we ordinarily *resist* pain, we sometimes will choose an action with painful consequences, *if* we think it is worth it in the long run.

focus your attention upon the group dynamic (i.e., the group’s struggle with resisting change), of which they play a part.

- Consider the possibility that the voices of resistance (no matter how poorly packaged) may have a grain of truth or a pearl worth discovering.

- Learn to recognize the signs of resistance in a group, as well as your own reactions to resistance, so you can respond proactively before reactions escalate out of control.

- Tease out the resistance you are encountering, and refine your discoveries; sift and sort what seems to fit; integrate new information, and expand your understanding.

REFRAMING RESISTANCE AS AN ALLY, NOT AS THE ENEMY

Resistance is natural to our human condition. Resistance is a natural occurrence in groups and individuals who are faced with something that may bring potential discomfort or pain. It is inbred into our human condition to avoid pain and seek out pleasure. Our higher cortical capacities for planning and moral conduct, however, enable us to get beyond these instinctual urges and to choose to postpone pleasure and endure temporary pain for something more important. We can sacrifice and endure pain for that which we perceive as more rewarding. We can delay gratification in the short run for better long-term gains. While we ordinarily *resist* pain, we sometimes will choose an action with painful consequences, *if* we think it is worth it in the long run. Moving beyond our resistance to encounter pain by choosing to go down a road of greater promise is the hallmark of psychological maturity and an essential element of any faith journey.

Resistance can be any attitude, thought, behavior or feeling that seems to thwart efforts toward reaching a goal or living out a commitment. We resist things that are asked of us, and even things that we, ourselves,

We learn that our resistance is not something that is *happening to us*, but is a *choice* that we make in order to avert the pain incurred in changing.

choose when we don't like them, want them, value them or fear what they might entail. For instance, while I might choose to go to the dentist, I might simultaneously *procrastinate* (i.e., resist) going to the dentist because I dread the pain of the dentist's drill. I might begin to *rationalize* (i.e., resist) that I can wait a few more months (e.g., "It's not that bad"). I might get wrapped up in doing the laundry or paying bills and *forget* (i.e., resist) my appointment.

Resistance need not be conscious or intentional. In fact, it is often unconscious, and we remain unaware of our own resistance. More often, we are conscious that we want to change, but we remain confused by our own self-defeating efforts. This is the very essence of what psychologists refer to as "neurosis." While we want to change, we simultaneously resist it. We go to a therapist to change our behavior and, then, we defend against the therapist's attempt to help us. We want to understand the truth, and yet we fear it at the same time.

Therapists help us to recognize that we often unconsciously or inadvertently sabotage our efforts to change, even though we desire to do so. We learn that our resistance is not something that is *happening to us*, but is a *choice* that we make in order to avert the pain incurred in changing. With this newfound awareness, we can then choose either to stay as we are or to change because we are more fully cognizant of the pain involved in either course of action. Resistance is no longer an unconscious adversary to the change process, but a *partner* that helps us appreciate the consequences we will incur if we make one choice over another.

Admittedly, this self-awareness is not welcomed or joyous news; nonetheless, it is valuable information. The value it yields is liberation. It gives us the freedom to make better-informed, value-based choices about the matter at hand, rather than choices resulting from reactive and fear-based urges. If we pay attention to the information that resistance offers us, we will learn so much. We will get a glimpse of the grieving and letting

go that will be asked of us, the compromises that will be needed, the difficult conversations we will need to have with those we care about and the practicing of new and awkward behaviors that we will have to embrace in order to change, etc. Resistance tells us where the pain is and, in so doing, the specific work we will need to do in order to move in one direction or another. Unpleasant though resistance may be, it is a valuable ally, a source of information and a virtual road map of the work ahead.

RESISTANCE IS NATURAL IN GROUPS

The first step in working with resistance is to understand resistance as a natural and necessary group dynamic, rather than as a problem or an anomaly. Expect it, invite it, and work with it as an ally, not as the enemy of a change process. Just as with individuals, resistance is an important dynamic to appreciate in a group. Groups also seek change and resist it at the same time. In a given group, individuals or subgroups take on the role of resisting a desired change. Some want change, while others resist it. Unfortunately, the individuals or subgroups resistant to change often get labeled as troublemakers or saboteurs or as problematic in one way or another. People begin to personalize this group dynamic and blame the persons resisting as spoilers of the group. They do not see the group as a system in which everyone plays a part.

In any group there is, of course, a small percentage of individuals who are mentally ill or emotionally unstable, and their resistance may say more about their personal struggles than it does about the group. In addition, some individuals who resist in a group may be more upset with those who are leading the group effort (e.g., leadership, facilitators) than with the group effort as such. And, there are certainly individuals who, in their struggle to understand and work with a group's effort, express their struggles in an unskilled manner (e.g., using judgmental, inflammatory or blaming language).

That said, the challenge that these individuals present still must be met, and it is more constructively met if understood and approached as part of group dynamic, rather than simply as an individual's problem. It is important to understand a group as an organism or system unto itself and not just as a collection of individuals. While individuals comprise a group, the group as a whole has dynamics and a life all its own. These two levels of an intact system (i.e., individuals and the group

they comprise) are not only separate and distinct, but they are connected and related, as well. An individual's behavior in a group says something about the individual, and it conveys something about the group (and vice versa). Each is a partial reflection of the other.

RESISTANT INDIVIDUALS EXPRESS A GROUP'S RESISTANCE

Rather than focusing upon individuals who may have emotional difficulties, strident personalities or poor communications skills as being the problem in a group, it is more constructive to view their voices as part of a system. It is more constructive to focus your attention upon the group dynamic (i.e., the group's struggle with resisting change) of which they play a part. It is more important in understanding group dynamics to ask yourself what this behavior might say about us as a group? What might their resistance be telling us about us?

Resistant voices express a group's ambivalence about choices, but instead of appreciating this as valuable information, groups tend to scapegoat and blame the individuals for thwarting progress. We view the resistance as their problem, instead of attending to the group's resistance. Resistance, when expressed through individual voices in a group, is saying something about the group as a whole. Just as with our own efforts to change, the answer to these seemingly group-defeating voices is not to stamp them out. On the contrary, the answer is to listen more intently. The answer is not to cave into, ignore or react defensively to their abrasive delivery or their cries of anguish, but to engage them and listen. The challenge is to not discount the message simply because it is difficult to hear, poorly packaged or untimely in its delivery. These voices are inviting us to examine more fully what we are seeking and the potentially painful implications or missing pieces of our choices.

RESISTANCE IS AN AS YET, UNDISCOVERED PIECE OF THE TRUTH

Consider the possibility that the voices of resistance (no matter how poorly packaged) may have a grain of truth or a pearl worth discovering. Resistance can be viewed either as a barrier or as a doorway to change, depending upon your perspective. From my perspective, I prefer to view resistance as a potential doorway to a deeper understanding. I believe that resistance is an, as yet, undiscovered piece of the truth. In other words, when we listen to resistance, when we

For instance, resistant voices can point out the flaws in a group's thinking or the pain that needs to be addressed, but that the group is perhaps avoiding.

take the time to understand what it is about, it often leads us to a deeper level of understanding about aspects of the truth heretofore neither fully appreciated nor incorporated.

Viewed in this manner, then, these so-called problematic people can be helpers to a group if the group is willing to listen. They can help a group recognize the work that needs to be done and about which the group is perhaps unaware or resistant to doing. For instance, resistant voices can point out the flaws in a group's thinking or the pain that needs to be addressed, but that the group is perhaps avoiding. They point to the conversations that need to happen that have not yet occurred or are, as yet, incomplete. They offer pearls that, if listened to, could assist a group to more fully integrate its understanding of the issue at hand.

I prefer to view resistance not as the barrier it appears to be, but as the invitation it can be to deepen our understanding of ourselves, our relationship with one another and, in a religious community, our faith journey. When we encounter resistance, we can either fight it or succumb to it as an obstacle, or we can reframe and embrace it as an invitation to grow. Viewed in this manner, it can be an invitation to search more deeply, share more fully and refine our perspective. Resistance, if explored, offers us the opportunity to be clearer about what we are saying. Resistant voices ask us to reexamine the values that undergird our position. Without voices of resistance, we would run the risk of making superficial changes because we do not have to be as accountable to address these hard questions or incorporate the wisdom of those who oppose the direction we are taking. The path of least resistance is not always the best path to take if you are seeking change built upon depth of understanding and integration of the diversity of many perspectives.

It would behoove us to listen to these challenges, rather than throw the baby out with the bathwater and label these people as the problem.

The decisions that groups are asked to face are typically big ones, ones that deserve the precious time of a group gathering. Those participants who resist in a group poke holes in decisions or directions that the majority of the group may desire. Despite the frequent problematic delivery, they inform us about the flaws in our reasoning, or they point out some information that is missing. Those who resist often oppose the decision because they believe that the group has not examined the implications adequately, or perhaps they object because they think that not enough diverse voices are heard in the process of decision-making. They tell us what we don't know, what we don't yet understand, what we haven't yet integrated. It would behoove us to listen to these challenges, rather than throw the baby out with the bathwater and label these people as the problem.

SIGNS OF RESISTANCE

What does resistance concretely look like? How is resistance acted out in a group setting, and how would you recognize it in yourself or others? There are an endless variety of behaviors that could convey resistance. Again, anything that seems to work against the chosen direction or established goal of a group could be considered a form of resistance. What follows is a sampling of some of the more common and, often, vexing ways in which resistance may be manifested in a group. Learn to recognize the signs of resistance in a group, as well as your own reactions to resistance, so you can respond proactively before reactions escalate out of control. It may be helpful for you to identify the ones that offer you the most challenge.

Overly talkative: A person tends to monopolize group time and take over in conversations.

Overly silent: A person is fearful, withdrawn or

angry and, consequently, refrains from speaking (even when asked).

Hidden agendas: A person expresses dissatisfaction with the direction of dialogue about an issue, but that person does not voice what is at stake for them.

Direct aggression: A person voices hostility toward the leadership, facilitator or another participant (e.g., "You are ridiculous. You have no right to tell us what to do").

Passive aggression: A person expresses anger in an indirect, camouflaged or veiled manner (e.g., verbal comments that are sarcastic; coming to the meeting late or leaving early).

Victim language: A person, directly or indirectly, blames others or states that some in the group are unjust or insensitive to the needs of others.

Noncompliance, non-cooperation: A person refuses to participate as requested (e.g., "I don't have to answer this question; it's irrelevant," or by not completing the task at hand).

Outbursts: A person suddenly throws a tantrum, displaying intense anger by yelling, accusing, venting or attacking.

Ultimatums: A person makes a threat in order to manipulate or coerce the group to act (or not) in specific ways (e.g., "If we don't stop talking about this, I'm going to leave!").

Criticisms about the process or the content: A person criticizes the process or content planned for the meeting (e.g., "I think we've spent too much time talking about this. We need to vote on it and move on!").

OUR RESISTANCE TO RESISTANCE

If resistance is natural, normal and so rich with potential, why wouldn't we want this type of help? Why wouldn't we want to make more solid, reflective, passion-filled and fully owned decisions by exploring the fruits of resistance? Our resistance to resistance is varied and complex; thus, I would not want to oversimplify it as merely our fear of encountering difficult behavior. Given the behavioral expressions of resistance mentioned above, I would like to elaborate on some of what prevents us from pursuing resistance. Let me outline what I consider to be some of the more compelling reasons:

We say we want ownership and involvement. However, to what extent do we value having to spend the time it takes to get everyone's voice into the process? Dealing with resistance takes time.

We say we want the passionate leaders who are willing to choose bold directions, but we stifle passion and boldness by choosing safe, overly sanitized processes in an attempt to avoid resistance.

We don't like to hear from those who resist in a blaming way because we don't like being publicly criticized, corrected and judged as being wrong or inadequate.

We don't want the tail wagging the dog; thus, we fear that those who voice resistance, if given enough air time, could sway or undermine the desires of the majority.

It is easier to label people and write them off as "anti-leadership," as having "authority issues," or as "crazy" rather than to challenge our judgmental attitudes, stretch our ways of thinking about them and their perspectives and open up to hear the potential wisdom that lies beneath their difficult behavior.

Those who resist often ask the hard questions and, consequently, challenge a group to work more diligently (e.g., gather more data, have more conversation, get more uncomfortable, etc.), and we don't want to work harder.

Those who resist often speak it in a manner that is unskilled or poorly packaged; we lose the pearl because we don't like the manner in which the message is delivered.

Challenging statements, even when expressed in a skilled and appropriate way, can bring groups to their knees if the facilitator and participants themselves are not willing and/or adept in how to handle conflict effectively within a group setting.

REACTIONS TO RESISTANCE

When you get right down to it, probably the biggest problem we have with the resistance we encounter in others is that it is annoying, if not downright exasperating. We don't like it. When we ask another person to do something, and we think that there are wonderful reasons why they should, we become upset if they are not enthusiastic, or at least cooperative. When facing someone else's resistance we often feel hurt, frustrated, angry or discouraged; after all, we are just trying to do something that is "good" for them.

Our defensive reactions and our urges to control resistance are understandable because it is no fun to deal with this potentially destructive phenomenon in a group. No one likes resistance. However, I believe that it is important to see the potential value in it and find ways to deal with it constructively. Preventing, control-

When you get right down to it, probably the biggest problem we have with the resistance we encounter in others is that it is annoying, if not downright exasperating.

ling or resisting resistance is simply not helpful. Becoming aware of our "unhelpful" reactions and urges can help us choose to respond more constructively. See if you can find some of your own reactions listed among the following examples:

Arguing: We counter objections with logic, reason or passionate pleas to convince those resisting to change their position about an issue.

Blaming: We become angry when someone shoots down our ideas; thus, our response might be to dismiss, blame or punish the individual and/or the group (e.g., "Maybe someone else should have volunteered to be on the planning committee," or, "Your comment is off track and isn't appropriate").

Convincing: We determine that *they* are the only ones who should shift their perspective or position because the majority disagrees with their opinion.

Threatening: We use our authority or our ability to overpower someone as a means to gain compliance.

Personalizing: We often personalize resistance by thinking that they just don't like us rather than appreciating the behavior as something to which the group must attend (e.g., "It is because of something I said in the past," or, "If they were not here, all would be well").

Disengaging: It is easy to become discouraged and decide that *it's not worth it*, in the face of resistance.

Going over, under or around; anywhere but through: We tend to interact more with participants who are more receptive and like-minded, while ignoring those whose voice is different.

Whatever are your tendencies in the face of resistance, learn to recognize and work with it. Befriend your reactions as a helpful sign that something important is happening: So pay attention. Let it be your guide to inform you about where the work is most

With a little hard work, you may be able to de-escalate the tension, restore group safety and discover whatever new information is begging to be understood.

needed, as well as an invitation to explore, as yet, undiscovered pieces of the truth.

WORKING WITH RESISTANCE

While there are tremendous benefits to working with resistance, this is a task that is easier spoken about than done. My partner and wife, Beth Lipsmeyer, Ph.D., and I teach conversational and conflict resolution skills through a program called **CARE** to communities that are seeking to grow in their collective capacity to dialogue more effectively. (Conversation Approach to Relational Effectiveness — **CARE** — is a training program Comprehensive Consulting Services designed to provide religious communities and other groups with tools for engaging in more effective dialogues and conflict resolution.)

However, not every community or group has a felt need to seek such comprehensive training. If training all your group's members is not an option, it may make sense to train a core group of people (e.g., assembly table facilitators) who could learn the necessary skills of working with resistance. This could benefit the entire group in accomplishing various and difficult agenda. Exploring all the skills necessary for working with resistance is beyond the scope of this article. However, here are a few tips to hold onto for your next meeting or assembly:

Remember, the goal is to tease out the resistance you are encountering and refine your discoveries; sift and sort what seems to fit; integrate new information, and expand your understanding. In response to an angrily expressed statement (e.g., "I don't like the way you are controlling this group!"), rather than run for the hills or respond in kind, try to remember these three things: **Engage**, **Respond** and **Explore**. While there is no formulaic way of responding to resistance,

if you can make these three efforts in a genuine manner you will improve your odds of responding successfully. At the very least, the resistant person and the group will breathe a sigh of relief that at least you are trying. They and the group will be more forgiving of your mistakes if you try to work with the tension rather than avoid it (e.g., "let's take a break"). With a little hard work, you may be able to de-escalate the tension, restore group safety and discover whatever new information is begging to be understood.

Engage the participant directly by paraphrasing what you heard the participant say. The greater the tension, the more likely it is that we distort what we hear, so checking it out is important. In addition, the simple act of engaging a person in our efforts to understand will usually put them at ease (rather than escalate the tension). They are likely ill-at-ease to begin with and bracing themselves for a retort of some kind or an argument. They may feel embarrassed and defensive because of their own outburst. Help them put down their guard by indicating your desire to partner with them, rather than argue with them or embarrass them further. It can ease their anxiety if they experience that they are not alone or out on a limb without a net, and that you will hang in there with them.

Summarize what you think they said and don't use pat phrases, such as, "What I hear you saying is...." That sounds like a technique, and most people don't want techniques inflicted on them. Simply paraphrase ("So you're telling me...."; or, "What you want me to understand is...."). After you try to summarize what you think they said, check out your accuracy. More often than not, especially amid tension, our efforts to paraphrase do not quite capture accurately what is said. Upon hearing their words back, they will appreciate having been heard and being given the opportunity to modify what they intended to say. This usually helps people refine and say better what they are trying to say (i.e., less harshly, more clearly).

After you have gone back and forth a bit clarifying what they meant and ensuring an accurate understanding, then **respond**. Ideally, your response is intended to open up a dialogue, not put an end to it by giving a pat answer. Your response should be one of invitation toward deeper understanding. Be genuine and constructive in your response. In other words, don't soap it by pretending to be delighted with their response (if you are not), and don't just respond in kind (by arguing). For example, you might say something

like, "I'm really struggling with what you are saying because I experience being judged by you. I honestly don't know what I did that you view as controlling. Can you help me understand...?" Your invitation toward deeper understanding needs to be real, not just a polite way to get them to justify their remark. If it is genuine, it will open things up, rather than shut them down.

After your initial response, **explore** what may be at stake for them, and the group, beyond the one remark that sparked it all. Find a bridge that connects their remark to the group as a whole (most often there is one). Help them articulate the piece of wisdom that may be underneath (e.g., "I wonder if what sparked your reaction was because our process did not make room for looking at the downside of this decision," or, "I wonder if what you're needing the group to understand most is that there is a dilemma in choosing this direction because..."). What you are listening for is something of what they said, or implied, that can be worthwhile to the group. If it just remains at the personal level, the group will experience your intervention as a "waste of time."

Embracing the difficult work of resistance is perhaps the hardest of all challenges encountered in group process. Clearly, it can be destructive and divisive to a group, but it can also be most rewarding and transformative if worked through successfully. The next time you encounter resistance, consider its potential gift to the group; think of it as an ally to the work of the group and a doorway toward deeper change.

Perhaps with a new mindset and a willingness to engage, respond and explore, you will find your way to a whole new level of understanding.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Hultman, K. *Making Change Irresistible: Overcoming Resistance to Change in Your Organization*. Palo Alto, CA: Davis-Black Publishing, 1998.

Maurer, R. *Beyond the Wall of Resistance: Unconventional Strategies that Build Support for Change*. Austin, TX: Bard Books, 1996.

Quinn, R. E. "Overcoming Resistance," *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996.



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RELIGIOUS BELIEFS BENEFICIAL TO TEEN-AGERS

According to psychologist Thomas Ashby Wills, Ph.D., of Albert Einstein College of Medicine, religious or spiritual beliefs protect adolescents from dangerous behaviors. Interestingly, however, this protective factor does not seem to stem from adhering to religious "do's" and "don'ts," but rather from the fact that religious beliefs help teens face life stresses better and thus keep them from smoking, drinking and drug use under stress.

His study of adolescents in New York City appeared in *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* (Vol. 17, No. 1, 2003). Another study of African-American teens in rural Iowa and Georgia produced the same findings. In addition, Gene H. Brody, Ph.D., of the University of Georgia, in three articles published in *Developmental Psychology* (Vol. 32, No. 4), *Child Development* (Vol. 69, No. 3) and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (Vol. 56, No. 4), reports that in a sample of African-American couples in the rural South, parental involvement in religion was correlated with a more harmonious marriage and better parenting skills, which led to better school performance and more competence in their children, behaviors associated with the avoidance of alcohol and drug use.

These findings are reported in "The Secret of the 12 Steps" by Rebecca Clay in *Monitor on Psychology* (December, 2003, 50-51); the article notes the benefits of religion or spirituality in 12-Step programs.