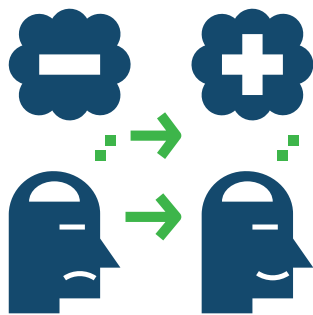




# Addressing the Opposition to Change



*There is no single way to deal with making change, but understanding resistance helps. Being patient and determined goes a long way to making it happen.*

**By Preston Ingalls**

An article published in the Harvard Business Review in May 2017 by Sally Blount and Shana Carroll shared research showing 50 to 75 percent of all change efforts bomb. But why do half to three quarters of all change efforts fail? The answer is simple, yet complex.

## COMFORT ZONES

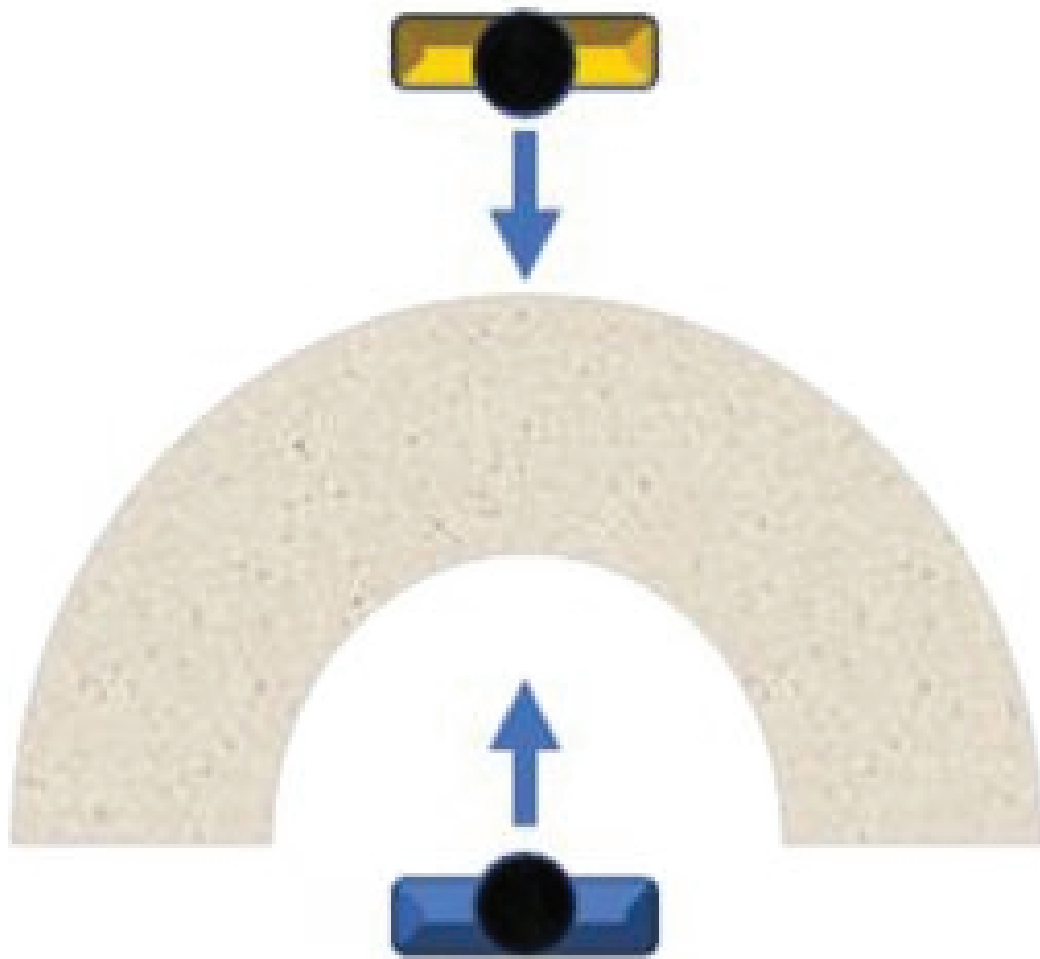
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The underlying reason why most efforts to change fail lies in those shoes you wear or that robe you put on every weekend morning or the recliner you have had for years. We enjoy our comforts and as a result, we appreciate those things that provide that warmth and security to us. Items of comfort have great meaning to us. They provide us with a feeling of safety and well-being. Therefore, despite the need to exchange those items, due to wear and tear, the replacement process may not be warmly embraced. After all, why would I surrender those comfortable Clarks slip-on shoes for a new pair that will be stiff and difficult to wear initially? I am not sure I will like the new ones as well as the old ones. It is not that I do not realize that the new pair will be more beneficial than the worn-out ones I have, I just have a problem releasing those that have brought me much comfort and utility in the past.

We have much invested in our lives, a particular way of life in which we choose to live, and we wish to preserve that investment. Employees get comfortable in their environment and, although they may complain about some of the aspects of their workplace, they still relish the security and well-being it brings. Despite some of the noticeable flaws of that environment, it is still my workplace and gives me a sense of security and a sense of duty. Obviously, an attempt to change that sanctuary would most likely generate resistance and opposition. Employees who become comfortable in a position, usually do so because they know their job well, they have a good relationship with their colleagues and management, and there is stability in their jobs. People search for things that bring this state of warmth and surrender them with great difficulty.

Many of us are afraid to pursue a new direction because it would force us to leave our comfort zones. We enjoy the status quo and it poses little risk to us. The common response is, "I have much invested here, and change seems to threaten that investment."





## RESISTANCE FACTORS

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It is in our nature that some of us are reluctant to change. In order for some of us to merit stepping out of our comfort zone, the outcome must be worth the risk. If you want to overcome resistance to change, you must understand its source. Let's examine the other contributors to resistance to change efforts.

## REASON 1

### NEED FOR SECURITY



A basic need for all humans is security. Our welfare and safekeeping is paramount. It is comforting to know what to expect from tomorrow before it has occurred; this helps us rest easy at night and allows us to feel secure. When that predictability or security is challenged, invitations to change may appear more like threats.

## REASON 2

### FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN



Change means moving to a new and different state. It is doing something that is not the same. Different implies stepping into the unknown, and the unknown causes uneasiness and fear. The proposed new state often creates worry and concern, which frightens us. We are confronted with choosing between fight or flight. Flight or fleeing might not be a consideration or even be feasible in our current situation, so pushing back, fighting against the new change, is a means for us to cope with this fear.

## REASON 3

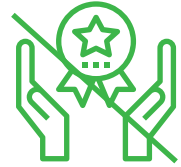
### LACK OF TRUST



Trust leads to confidence. If there is a lack of trust for the implementers or supporters of change, suspicion may cause resistance. I am less likely to embrace your efforts if I suspect your motivations or integrity. Some may also resist change to show that the person leading the change effort is not up to the task. This is a political motivation. Another related barrier would be a failure of previous efforts which would cause some to lose faith and confidence in new efforts.

#### REASON 4

### BENEFIT NOT EVIDENT



I will need to see the value of making the change to support the change. If the benefits are not evident or do not affect me, there may be little incentive to support the efforts. The rewards must be encouraging to incentivize movement. Showing how the change benefits the company may provide little inspiration to me when I need to hear them at a personal level. How will this help me? Rarely do people resist change that is in their best interest.

#### REASON 5

### DISAGREEMENT WITH THE DIRECTION



I may have the assumption that everything is satisfactory and therefore, there is no real need to change. Some resist change as a strategy to “prove” that the decision was wrong or the direction of the change is incorrect. Do not ask me to blindly follow the wrong direction.

#### REASON 6

### FEAR OF FAILURE



New ways and activities may bring concern for our ability to handle the changes. A change resulting in a need for different skills and knowledge could appear to be beyond our capability. The question could arise as to “What if I can’t do it?” If we fail at this challenge to our abilities, concerns could be for possible loss of status or job due to that failure. We want to be successful at what we do and the longer we have been doing certain activities, the more competent we are and feel. Therefore, a demand for different skills and knowledge may create less ease. If things change, I may fail. If they remain the same, I will not because I know how to do what I am currently doing. Change can appear awkward, so no change means no awkwardness.

## REASON 7

### LOSS OF CONTROL



I have a certain level of control over current activities and responsibilities. A shift in that could result in less control or autonomy. For example, the formation of teams, to engage the workforce, could pose a threat to the decision making and authority currently being exercised. Loss of control, at the worst, could appear to border on chaos while at the least I am more dispensable than before. This new arrangement may not be attractive to support and warrant my passive or active resistance.

## REASON 8

### FEAR OF MORE WORK



Change means moving to a new and different state. It is doing something that is not the same. Different implies stepping into the unknown, and the unknown causes uneasiness and fear. The proposed new state often creates worry and concern, which frightens us. We are confronted with choosing between fight or flight. Flight or fleeing might not be a consideration or even be feasible in our current situation, so pushing back, fighting against the new change, is a means for us to cope with this fear.

## REASON 9

### CONFUSION



To feel comfortable with the new direction, I need to have as much information and details as possible. Without that information, I feel lost. If I am driving on a trip, I need to have signs and landmarks to direct me. Wandering around on back roads may create a great sense of anxiety. Many change efforts fail due to poor information and a lack of a clear plan as to how we will get there.



Another contributor to resistance is the perception that it is the wrong time to implement the change efforts. “We are really busy now so why are they trying to get us to do this?” Or it could be “Business is slow so why are we not concentrating on improving that instead of this?” The timing seems to be off for implanting something new, so it seems irrational to support such a move.

## THE PATH TO TRUE CHANGE

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As members of leadership, we tend to have one view of things while employees may have another. It is similar to the diagram. If one person is viewing a wall from the outside, it appears to be curved inward. However, if you are looking at that wall from the inside, it appears to be curved outward. One view is concave and the other is convex ... yet it is the exact same wall. We are both looking at the same situation yet drawing different conclusions based on our viewpoint. It is the variance caused by different perspectives. It happens all the time. “I see it one way and you see it another.”

People will embrace change at different times based on their level of risk acceptance and how well the organization addresses these concerns. Logic alone is not sufficient to win most over to the new direction.

True change requires addressing the emotional concerns through constant communications, presenting benefits, rewarding the new behavior, coaching, educational sessions and dogged persistence.



Communications, using various means, can help greatly. Surfacing the concerns to address them is another. Fears and concerns are real to people and need to be addressed. A parent who tells the five-year old, "Stop crying and go to sleep; there are no monsters in your bedroom", has a different level of effectiveness compared to the one who attempts to reassure the child by having them get up and jointly looking in the closet and under the bed together, "See, there are none. Now hop in the bed and go to sleep. It was just your imagination."

There is no single way to deal with making change, but understanding resistance helps. Being patient and determined goes a long way to making it happen. If you want your change efforts to be in the success rate percentage, move beyond logic and understand the emotion behind it.

*With more than 46 years of experience, Preston Ingalls, President/CEO of TBR Strategies (Raleigh, NC), has led maintenance and reliability improvement efforts across 30 countries for a variety of companies. He consults extensively with heavy equipment fleets and the oil and gas industry in the areas of equipment uptime and cost reduction.*

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