

Partners in Learning
Learning to Lead Change: Building System Capacity
Leadership for Change Library

Beyond the Wall of Resistance

Rick Maurer

Austin, TX: Bard Books, 1996

208 pages

The oldest book in our collection and a gem because it puts a new more constructive face on "resistance." Maurer starts by naming the basic problem: when we face resistance to our ideas, most of us react with an assortment of ineffective approaches. When it comes to new ideas that we hold to be critical for addressing urgent problems, it is normal, says Maurer, to do things which unwittingly make matters worse.

Maurer cites several traps we fall into: use power, manipulate those who oppose, apply force of reason, ignore resistance, play off relationships, make deals, kill the messenger, give in too soon. Using one or more of these elements may be understandable, but instead of decreasing resistance they end up widening the divide. They increase resistance, the win might not be worth the cost, they fail to create synergy, they create fear and suspicion, and they separate us from others.

Instead, Maurer recommends practicing and using five, what he calls "Touchstones": Touchstone One: Maintain Focus (be resilient which is persistence plus flexibility); Touchstone Two: Embrace Resistance (a counterintuitive stance in which you find out more about the reasons of resistance — resisters often have a kernel of good ideas, and the politics of implementation require making links); Touchstone Three: Respect Those Who Resist (this involves empathy, which does not mean that you agree with another person, but rather that you understand accurately where they are coming from); Touchstone 4: Relax (stay calm, don't take things personally); and Touchstone 5: Join With the Resistance (don't join a bad game, but change the game to find common themes or starting points).

Maurer stresses that we must take on board the entire set: review and reflect on the making matters worse tendencies when you are in a change situation; practice all five touchstones in real situations; and (again a common theme in our books) take action. A number of ideas and tools are presented in the book to guide the actions we take.

Why We Like This Book

Because it treats resistance as normal, and inevitable, and even healthy in many circumstances. The book helps us become more relaxed about resistance, gives great concepts about the do's and don'ts of handling/mishandling resistance. There are few realistic, constructive books on resistance. This is a unique book in the field that will be helpful for changing our mind and action set when it comes to situations of disagreement. All changes worth their salt generate conflicts. It is how we handle the conflicts that determines whether it will be a positive or negative force.



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