

RESISTANCE and LACK of BUY-IN:

What's in it for me?



The Challenge

- When you introduce the topic of the meeting you notice bored looks, eye rolling and folded arms.
- People shake their heads and give each other sideways glances.
- When you ask for participation you get silence instead.
- If participants do open up, they say things like: "I'm too busy for this! This is a total waste of time! Nothing ever happens afterwards!"

What's Really Going On

- People may be overworked and unable to cope with additional responsibilities.
- People may not see any positive outcome for themselves and feel that they are just being asked to do more work.
- The environment may be filled with cynicism and mistrust because past initiatives were inadequately supported or not implemented.
- Leadership may have become the enemy, with you standing in as their agent.
- Some participants may sit passively through the meeting, then work behind the scenes to undermine whatever initiative is launched.



Facilitator Pitfalls

- Ignoring the negative body language and just forging ahead.
- Relying only on humor to improve how people feel.
- Selling the initiative by pointing out all the good points.
- Giving participants a pep talk about team spirit and urging them to give it a try.
- Getting defensive and mirroring the group's negativity.
- Falling back on your professional credentials.
- Mentioning your connections with people in authority.
- Making people feel its all nonnegotiable and there's no turning back.

Intervention Strategies

- If people are displaying negative body language, report on the behaviors you see. Make it okay for people to express their negativity:
“I’m noticing some folded arms and concerned looks. We all need to know what’s on people’s minds. Please tell us what this means.”
- Listen respectfully to concerns and paraphrase main points.
- If you sense resistance under the surface, you can draw it out by posting a resistance scale. Ask each person to secretly select where they are on the scale. Assure people that they do not have to reveal their ratings.
“Where are you in relation to this meeting/initiative?
1 – I’m totally out
2 – Somewhat out
3 – On the fence
4 – Feeling mostly in
5 – Totally committed
- Once people have secretly identified where they are, pose a question:
“What would you need to believe was going to be the outcome of this activity before you would move your rating toward 5? What conditions would need to be in place? What supports or assurances would you need?”
- To encourage people to speak up, ask everyone to find a partner so that they can safely reveal their conditions for moving forward.
- Record all the desired outcomes, conditions, assurances and supports on a flip chart. Be careful not to eliminate those that seem unrealistic at this point.
- When the discussion is over, review all the conditions for moving forward; during this review ask group members to assess how realistic each condition is.
- Form an ad hoc committee to meet with the appropriate leaders and develop a plan for addressing the conditions and reporting back to the entire group.

TIP: The only effective way to dispense with resistance is to acknowledge it and engage group members in identifying strategies to overcome it.

