

MANAGING RESISTANCE

Note to the leader:

Provide each participant with a copy of the two handouts (“Managing Resistance” and “Nine Healthy Ways to Communicate”) a week before Part Three of the Core Curriculum. Their assignment is to read them thoroughly and contemplate the usefulness of the tips and ideas shared in these handouts. We will be practicing applying these to our conversations in Part Three.

MANAGING RESISTANCE

Resistance to change is normal even when that change is in our best interests. How we *manage* resistance – our own and others' – can take us from gridlock to growth!

We all know people who resist changes that would lead to better health, and we all know people who want to keep things just as they are. Resistance is the effort to stay with the familiar. Resistance is a rejection of the unknown.

Remember a time when you had to change. How did you respond? Keep in mind that our response to change can be something we choose! When changes come (as they always do – that's the one unchanging thing about life), our response doesn't have to be automatic. We can choose how to respond.

How do we recognize resistance – in ourselves or in others? Some indicators include:

- Forgetting, canceling or rescheduling appointments
- Ignoring identified norms or routines that help a group function
- Forgetting to complete assignments or maintain supplies
- Falling into crisis
- Attributing destructive motives to those who seek to make changes.

What others can you think of?

A healthy organization, like a healthy organism, will change. When a child no longer wants to be carried but wants to walk on her own, do we see it as a bad thing or a good thing? Change is organic. Change is necessary. Change is healthy. Change can move us forward to further growth and opportunity.

Change is unavoidable. Change is not personal. Change is not a bad thing even if our response – our resistance – is uncomfortable for us and unhelpful to the community.

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re-sist-ance (noun)

1. the refusal to accept or comply with something; the attempt to prevent something by action or argument.
2. the ability not to be affected by something, especially adversely.

Another way healthy change is blocked is by the tyranny of tradition. What does tradition have to do with mission?

Excluding or rejecting what doesn't fit the existing paradigm prevents refreshment, re-energizing and growth. And while it is one way to avoid change, it requires us all to become what tradition dictates rather than becoming what God has provided the world in Christ. That is not a recipe for spiritual health.

Sometimes we seem to believe that our personal comfort is more important than progress – even if the comfortable habit isn't in our best interest.

Perhaps the worst reason to do something is because we've always done it that way. Some habits began as things we chose for ourselves – serving chicken for dinner each Sunday, following a particular baseball team – and some habits began as unthinking responses to threats – sounding alarms, crying, starting arguments, becoming depressed. The first can be fun; the latter can be quite unhealthy!

We can make better, bolder choices, but it can be difficult. We may have been taught that we are limited and weak. We may believe that we are not capable enough, wise enough, or strong enough to open ourselves to new ways of encountering the Holy Spirit – or life!

Emotional resistance sees change as a personal betrayal. When we take change personally, we can speak in absolutes – we were absolutely wronged. We might talk as though this sort of thing always happens when the truth might be closer to: This is how we always react when we feel threatened, and change threatens us!

Emotional resistance is ego-based or personality-driven. Emotional resistance sees change as a judgment of *me* and the way *I* have done things. If I believe that my worth is embedded in the things that I do and how others view me, rather than in the God that I serve or the person that God's grace is creating me to be, emotional resistance makes a great deal of sense.

We may extrapolate: At some point in time *I* was given a job to do. *I* was trusted to do that job. Now, *I* am told *I* must change the way *I* am doing this job! I guess *I* am no longer trusted!

We may personalize it: If a new leader asks me to change (and I don't have the connection with her that I had with the previous leader), I put up a strong emotionally charged response. I can undermine this new leader, wondering aloud what she's trying to do to our group and what kind of result she expects.

We might rationalize our resistance by telling ourselves and others things like:

- We have been doing this for years and everyone works as a group.
- We have lots of fun working together and we get the work done. So why are we being asked to change how we do this? We are the experts about our own group!

If we have never learned healthy responses to change, we will fight vigorously to keep change out. We will sacrifice the messiness and time-consuming nature of authentic relationship. We will miss developing the deep trust in God that makes us unafraid.

Psychological resistance is value related. Whenever deep-seated expectations, perceptions or beliefs are challenged by change, our resistance is psychological in nature. For example, if we have a deep-seated belief that only men can be pastors (even though we really know better) we might find it difficult to call a woman to be a pastor for our congregation. It just won't feel right! *Implicit bias* provides our resistance.

Psychological resistance can take the form of expecting to be seen as a “good [whatever]” without necessarily doing whatever it takes to warrant such a judgment. An example of a question that indicates this kind of resistance is: “Can't White people lead people of color in a compassionate, healthy way?” This question suggests a psychological resistance to people of color in leadership. Notice that the question almost sounds reasonable! That is exactly how resistance trips us up.

Psychological resistance does not take into account our own responsibility to the relationships or communities into which changes come. Our psychological resistance makes us willing to confuse and even hinder progress because there is a core value or life expectation that we fear the change will compromise.

Whenever resistance occurs, we are personalizing what is taking place either based on our feelings or how we imagine our core values will be compromised by a change. Both emotional and psychological resistance require us to take change *personally*.

When we practice not taking things personally, we free ourselves from unnecessary suffering and free ourselves for an authentic and healing partnership with God and others. We free ourselves to get excited about what new thing we will learn next!

Recognizing, understanding and lowering our own resistance are essential steps to take. We can learn how our head and heart can work together on change, and not against one another. Such knowledge comes with prayer and sacred surrender.

We can discover our own path of least resistance. Pay compassionate attention to any

tug of war between our deepest desires and our feelings about change. Choose self-care as you move through the changes that life and growth require.

Do this and prepare to welcome the delightful surprises God's grace will bring into your life!