
----- WHAT'S UP, DOC? -----

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"Creating Leadership Solutions for Profit and Growth"

THIS MONTH'S THEME: OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

A weekend trip to Barnes & Noble can be a dispiriting experience for an expert in leadership and change management. I dread viewing the shelves that house books on my area of expertise, because I find that so much of what is written out there is fluffy, too often lacking in substance or genuine utility. In these newsletters and in my programs, I try to get beyond the platitudes and generalities we have all repeatedly heard, to reach a greater level of insight and practical advice. I'm hopeful I can meet those standards for you this month as I take a look at why people tend to resist change, either for themselves or for their organizations. If you're involved in promoting change, either for yourself, your children or your workplace, I hope that identifying some of these roots of resistance will lead directly to practical steps you can take to address them, and therefore be more successful as a leader. As ever, let me know what you may have liked or disliked about this month's edition so I can keep sharpening my content for you – and thanks to all of you for making August, 2003 a record month for the enrollment of new members into this burgeoning, underground "What's Up, Doc?" community.

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTES:

"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it." -- Aristotle

“Wonder is the beginning of wisdom.” -- Greek Proverb

“The way to defeat fear: decide on a course of conduct and follow it. Keep so busy and work so hard that you forget about being afraid.”-- Dale Carnegie

1. TOP TEN REASONS PEOPLE RESIST CHANGE

THE RISK OF CHANGE IS SEEN AS GREATER THAN THE RISK OF STANDING STILL

Making a change requires a kind of leap of faith: you decide to move in the direction of the unknown on the promise that something will be better for you. But you have no proof. Taking that leap of faith is risky, and people will only take active steps toward the unknown if they genuinely believe – and perhaps more importantly, feel – that the risks of standing still are greater than those of moving forward in a new direction. Making a change is all about managing risk. If you are making the case for change, be sure to set out in stark, truthful terms why you believe the risk situation favors change. Use numbers whenever you can, because we in the West pay attention to numbers. At the very least, they get our attention, and then when the rational mind is engaged, the emotional mind (which is typically most decisive) can begin to grapple with the prospect of change. But if you only sell your idea of change based on idealistic, unseen promises of reward, you won't be nearly as effective in moving people to action. The power of the human fight-or-flight response can be activated to fight for change, but that begins with the perception of risk.

PEOPLE FEEL CONNECTED TO OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE IDENTIFIED WITH THE OLD WAY

We are a social species. We become and like to remain connected to those we know, those who have taught us, those with whom we are familiar – even at times to our own detriment. Loyalty certainly helped our ancestors hunt antelope and defend against the aggressions of hostile tribes, and so we are hard wired, I believe, to form emotional bonds of loyalty, generally speaking. If you ask people in an organization to do things in a new way, as rational as that new way may seem to you, you will be setting yourself up against all that hard wiring, all those emotional connections to those who taught your audience the old way - and that's not trivial. At the very least, as you craft your change message, you should make statements that honor the work and contributions of those who brought such success to the organization in the past, because on a very human but seldom articulated level, your audience will feel asked to

betray their former mentors (whether those people remain in the organization or not). A little good diplomacy at the outset can stave off a lot of resistance.

PEOPLE HAVE NO ROLE MODELS FOR THE NEW ACTIVITY

Never underestimate the power of observational learning. If you see yourself as a change agent, you probably are something of a dreamer, someone who uses the imagination to create new possibilities that do not currently exist. Well, most people don't operate that way. It's great to be a visionary, but communicating a vision is not enough. Get some people on board with your idea, so that you or they can demonstrate how the new way can work. Operationally, this can mean setting up effective pilot programs that model a change and work out the kinks before taking your innovation "on the road." For most people, seeing is believing. Less rhetoric and more demonstration can go a long way toward overcoming resistance, changing people's objections from the "It can't be done!" variety to the "How can we get it done?" category.

PEOPLE FEAR THEY LACK THE COMPETENCE TO CHANGE

This is a fear people will seldom admit. But sometimes, change in organizations necessitates changes in skills, and some people will feel that they won't be able to make the transition very well. They don't think they, as individuals, can do it. The hard part is that some of them may be right. But in many cases, their fears will be unfounded, and that's why part of moving people toward change requires you to be an effective motivator. Even more, a successful change campaign includes effective new training programs, typically staged from the broad to the specific. By this I mean that initial events should be town-hall type information events, presenting the rationale and plan for change, specifying the next steps, outlining future communications channels for questions, etc., and specifying how people will learn the specifics of what will be required of them, from whom, and when. Then, training programs must be implemented and evaluated over time. In this way, you can minimize the initial fear of a lack of personal competence for change by showing how people will be brought to competence throughout the change process. Then you have to deliver.

PEOPLE FEEL OVERLOADED AND OVERWHELMED

Fatigue can really kill a change effort, for an individual or for an organization. If, for example, you believe you should quit smoking, but you've got ten projects going and four kids to keep up with, it can be easy to put off your personal health improvement project (until your first heart attack or cancer scare, when suddenly the risks of standing still seem greater than the risks of change!). When you're introducing a change effort, be aware of fatigue as a factor in keeping people from moving forward, even if they are telling you they believe in the wisdom of your

idea. If an organization has been through a lot of upheaval, people may resist change just because they are tired and overwhelmed, perhaps at precisely the time when more radical change is most needed! That's when you need to do two things: re-emphasize the risk scenario that forms the rationale for change (as in my cancer scare example), and also be very generous and continuously attentive with praise, and with understanding for people's complaints, throughout the change process. When you reemphasize the risk scenario, you're activating people's fears, the basic fight-or-flight response we all possess. But that's not enough, and fear can produce its own fatigue. You've got to motivate and praise accomplishments as well, and be patient enough to let people vent (without getting too caught up in attending to unproductive negativity).

PEOPLE HAVE A HEALTHY SKEPTICISM AND WANT TO BE SURE NEW IDEAS ARE SOUND

It's important to remember that few worthwhile changes are conceived in their final, best form at the outset. Healthy skeptics perform an important social function: to vet the change idea or process so that it can be improved upon along the road to becoming reality. So listen to your skeptics, and pay attention, because some percentage of what they have to say will prompt genuine improvements to your change idea (even if some of the criticism you will hear will be based more on fear and anger than substance).

PEOPLE FEAR HIDDEN AGENDAS AMONG WOULD-BE REFORMERS

Let's face it, reformers can be a motley lot. Not all are to be trusted. Perhaps even more frightening, some of the worst atrocities modern history has known were begun by earnest people who really believed they knew what was best for everyone else. Reformers, as a group, share a blemished past . . . And so, you can hardly blame those you might seek to move toward change for mistrusting your motives, or for thinking you have another agenda to follow shortly. If you seek to promote change in an organization, not only can you expect to encounter resentment for upsetting the established order and for thinking you know better than everyone else, but you may also be suspected of wanted to increase your own power, or even eliminate potential opposition through later stages of change. I saw this in a recent change management project for which I consulted, when management faced a lingering and inextinguishable suspicion in some quarters that the whole affair was a prelude to far-reaching layoffs. It was not the case, but no amount of reason or reassurance sufficed to quell the fears of some people. What's the solution? Well, you'd better be interested in change for the right reasons, and not for personal or factional advantage, if you want to minimize and overcome resistance. And you'd better be as open with information and communication as you possibly can be, without reacting unduly to

accusations and provocations, in order to show your good faith, and your genuine interest in the greater good of the organization. And if your change project will imply reductions in workforce, then be open about that and create an orderly process for outplacement and in-house retraining. Avoid the drip-drip-drip of bad news coming out in stages, or through indirect communication or rumor. Get as much information out there as fast as you can and create a process to allow everyone to move on and stay focused on the change effort.

PEOPLE FEEL THE PROPOSED CHANGE THREATENS THEIR NOTIONS OF THEMSELVES

Sometimes change on the job gets right to a person's sense of identity. When a factory worker begins to do less with her hands and more with the monitoring of automated instruments, she may lose her sense of herself as a craftsperson, and may genuinely feel that the very things that attracted her to the work in the first place have been lost. I saw this among many medical people and psychologists during my graduate training, as the structures of medical reimbursement in this country changed in favor of the insurance companies, HMO's and managed care organizations. Medical professionals felt they had less say in the treatment of their patients, and felt answerable to less well trained people in the insurance companies to approve treatments the doctors felt were necessary. And so, the doctors felt they had lost control of their profession, and lost the ability to do what they thought best for patients. My point is not to take sides in that argument, but to point out how change can get right to a person's sense of identity, the sense of self as a professional. As a result, people may feel that the intrinsic rewards that brought them to a particular line of work will be lost with the change. And in some cases, they may be absolutely right. The only answer is to help people see and understand the new rewards that may come with a new work process, or to see how their own underlying sense of mission and values can still be realized under the new way of operating. When resistance springs from these identity-related roots, it is deep and powerful, and to minimize its force, change leaders must be able to understand it and then address it, acknowledging that change does have costs, but also, (hopefully) larger benefits.

PEOPLE ANTICIPATE A LOSS OF STATUS OR QUALITY OF LIFE

Real change reshuffles the deck a bit. Reshuffling the deck can bring winners . . . and losers. Some people, most likely, will gain in status, job security, quality of life, etc. with the proposed change, and some will likely lose a bit. Change does not have to be a zero sum game, and change can (and should) bring more advantage to more people than disadvantage. But we all live in the real world, and let's face it – if there were no obstacles (read: people and their interests) aligned against change, then special efforts to promote change would be unnecessary. Some people will, in part, be aligned against change because they will clearly, and in

some cases correctly, view the change as being contrary to their interests. There are various strategies for minimizing this, and for dealing with steadfast obstacles to change in the form of people and their interests, but the short answer for dealing with this problem is to do what you can to present the inevitability of the change given the risk landscape, and offer to help people to adjust. Having said that, I've never seen a real organizational change effort that did not result in some people choosing to leave the organization, and sometimes that's best for all concerned. When the organization changes, it won't be to everyone's liking, and in that case, it's best for everyone to be adult about it and move on.

PEOPLE GENUINELY BELIEVE THAT THE PROPOSED CHANGE IS A BAD IDEA

I'll never forget what a supervisor of mine said to be, during the year after I had graduated from college, secure as I was in the knowledge of my well earned, pedigreed wisdom at age twenty-two. We were in a meeting, and I made the comment, in response to some piece of information, "Oh, I didn't know that!" Ricky, my boss, looked at me sideways, and commented dryly, "Things you don't know . . . fill libraries." The truth is, sometimes someone's (even – gasp! – my) idea of change is just not a good idea. Sometimes people are not being recalcitrant, or afraid, or muddle-headed, or nasty, or foolish when they resist. They just see that we're wrong. And even if we're not all wrong, but only half wrong, or even if we're right, it's important not to ignore when people have genuine, rational reservations or objections. Not all resistance is about emotion, in spite of this list I've assembled here. To win people's commitment for change, you must engage them on both a rational level and an emotional level. I've emphasized the emotional side of the equation for this list because I find, in my experience, that this is the area would-be change agents understand least well. But I'm also mindful that a failure to listen to and respond to people's rational objections and beliefs is ultimately disrespectful to them, and to assume arrogantly that we innovative, change agent types really do know best. A word to the wise: we're just as fallible as anyone.

2. CAN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE REALLY IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH?

Sometimes I like to highlight an article that interests me, and that I think might interest some of you. This article in the New York Times caught my eye today as I sat to write this month's "What's Up, Doc?" The piece

is entitled, "Power of Positive Thinking May Have a Health Benefit, Study Says." Check out the article by clicking [here](#).

If you're interested in some of my own past writing on positivity, and you're not a longtime subscriber, you may be interested in an archived newsletter I wrote last year, on a theme I called "Mature Optimism." You can find that past newsletter on-line by clicking [here](#).

3. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND FILMS

BOOK: "Washington," by Meg Greenfield, Public Affairs, New York, 2001.

I read this in paperback over the summer. Perhaps you are one of the people who has the (mis)fortune (?!) to live and work, as I do, in the Washington, D. C. metropolitan area. Perhaps you are one of the many people in the world who observes the way this city behaves and you feel utterly perplexed. Or perhaps you just have an interest in some of the dynamics that occur when powerful people with strong egos congregate. The late Meg Greenfield, formerly of the Washington Post, knew the D. C. power elite species from decades of up-close observation, and she writes entertainingly and insightfully in this, her memoir. A pretty quick read, and worth the effort. She is so correct when she says that insider Washington most resembles . . . high school!

FILMS: "Dirty Pretty Things," and also "American Splendor," in select theaters.

In what turned out to be a pretty weak summer blockbuster season, "Finding Nemo" was the pop movie of the summer. This time of year is not known for much from Hollywood, but both of these movies were quite good. Well, at least, I liked them. "Dirty Pretty Things" features great acting and a tension filled story, though I would not exactly call it a mystery or a thriller. To find out more about the film, click [here](#). "American Splendor," even more than "Dirty Pretty Things," defies easy categorization. It's a new take on a biopic, in this case, of a nebbishy, depressive, insightful and oddly funny comic book writer, whose comics are about his own life and every day experiences. Along the way we are treated to his odd un-courtship to his wife, his appearances on Late Night with David Letterman and his bout with cancer. The central character even appears as himself to comment on the film at whiles – very odd, but it works. The film supports the underlying premise that the every day

experiences of common people possess meaning and importance, and also that success can indeed come to the unlikeliest of people who can find their own voice, their own unique talents. To learn more about “American Splendor,” click [here](#).

4. CHUCKLES

Parent's Dictionary of Meanings:

DUMBWAITER: one who asks if the kids would care to order dessert.

FEEDBACK: the inevitable result when the baby doesn't appreciate the strained carrots.

FULL NAME: what you call your child when you're mad at him.

GRANDPARENTS: the people who think your children are wonderful even though they're sure you're not raising them right.

HEARSAY: what toddlers do when anyone mutters a dirty word.

INDEPENDENT: how we want our children to be as long as they do everything we say.

OW: the first word spoken by children with older siblings

PUDDLE: a small body of water that draws other small bodies wearing dry shoes into it.

SHOW OFF: a child who is more talented than yours.

STERILIZE: what you do to your first baby's pacifier by boiling it, and to your last baby's pacifier by blowing on it and wiping it with saliva.

TOP BUNK: where you should never put a child wearing Superman jammies.

TWO-MINUTE WARNING: when the baby's face turns red and she begins to make those familiar grunting noises.

VERBAL: able to whine in words

WHODUNIT: none of the kids that live in your house

5. HOW TO GET MORE FROM SCHULER SOLUTIONS

The majority of you subscribers found this e-Newsletter through the Schuler Solutions web site, and have not been clients, though clients certainly do subscribe to “What’s Up, Doc?”

Aside from clients, though, you subscribers are the people out there who “know” me and my work the best, and so you are in the best position to let others know about who I am and what I do, if you feel so inclined. If you’re willing, here’s what you can do:

GET MY NAME TO YOUR COMPANY’S HUMAN RESOURCE DIRECTOR

Tell him or her that you subscribe to my e-Newsletter and that I provide seminars to organizations, and that I might be a valuable resource for them to explore

GET MY NAME TO YOUR CEO, COO OR OTHER SENIOR EXECUTIVE

My typical buyer for consulting services is often not the HR department but some senior executive who faces the need to reorganize operations or perhaps manage an acquisition. Even if your senior executive has no immediate need for my company’s services, he or she may appreciate having the contact information, just in case.

GET MY NAME TO YOUR ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT OR MEETING PLANNER

I don’t just provide consulting services – I provide entertaining, content rich presentations for conferences, either as a keynote presenter or as a breakout session presenter. Many or most of you belong to professional associations, and meeting planners are always looking for good presenters. Getting my name to your association presidents or to meeting planners will help them find good resources that they know will connect with their members. And you might not have to snooze through your next conference!

GET MY NAME TO YOUR COMPANY’S MEETING OR CONFERENCE PLANNER

Ditto the above. Corporations have meetings and conferences, on national and regional levels, throughout the year, and meeting planners need good

content that will be relevant to organization members' needs. Get my name to your company's meeting or conference planner and maybe our paths may cross at your next off-site event!

GET MY NAME TO ANY MANAGER OR EXECUTIVE WHO WOULD LIKE MORE EXECUTIVE EDUCATION, BUT WHO LACKS THE TIME TO PURSUE IT

One friend and fellow Wharton alumnus said to me recently that he knows a lot of people who could benefit from my help, but he feels that recommending me would amount to a criticism of someone else! I understand his dilemma, though my coaching services really amount to a novel way to obtain executive education that is personalized, confidential and convenient – no one needs to take time off from work, leave town or attend a special university program. I would call my “Personalized Executive Coaching (PEC)” work “Personalized Executive Education,” but the acronym is a little problematic . . . If you or someone you know is in a position to lead an organization or part of it, and would like to learn his or her options for getting better at what they do (learning in a few weeks what they might otherwise take years to learn or understand), then give them my name, and we can see together if I have a plan and program that might meet their needs.

6. PROMOTE YOUR OWN GROWTH

You don't have to live near the Schuler Solutions main office in Alexandria, Virginia to benefit from my coaching services. Great work can be done for your own growth and development over the phone and through document review via email. To find out more about your coaching options and available coaching plans, just click [here](#) now.

7. ABOUT DR. SCHULER

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D., an expert on leadership and organizational change, provides consulting services, keynote presentations and seminars for client companies. His trademark is highly personalized service that leads to measurable increases in productivity, profit and growth. He also provides personalized leadership education and coaching for highly motivated

clients.

Dr. Schuler, President of Schuler Solutions, Inc., has served diverse organizations in the private and public sectors, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Sony Development, Nomura Securities and the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

A graduate of the Wharton School of Business, Dr. Schuler has successfully led the profitable growth of a dynamic, international consulting firm while serving as Operations Director, and has successfully coached over five hundred CEO's and corporate executives.

8. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE

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“Make each day your masterpiece.” -- John Wooden

P.S. - Remember to send in your comments and successes, and to forward this newsletter to at least one friend. -- AJS :-]