

Articles for Managers

Dealing With Resistance: The 4 + 2 Method

by Ian Cook



Ian Cook, trainer, consultant, keynote speaker and Principal of Fulcrum Associates Inc., helps managers and supervisors get more from their people and teams through modern leadership approaches. Contact Ian to discuss the ideas in this article or to find out about related training programs, facilitation and coaching services, and keynote presentations for your organization.

We've all lived this before. Sally, the manager, asks her employee Gary to prepare a market analysis report for next week. Gary moans and says he doesn't think he can do it by then... too much work and, besides, why not give it to Sherry who has a marketing background. The manager detects the "I don't wanna" whine and feels the heavy inertia of Gary's heels digging in.

*"Seek first to understand
and then be understood."*

At that moment what Sally really wants to do is to respond in the old style of leadership, with both barrels blazing: "I don't want any excuses, Gary, just see that YOU have that on my desk by Tuesday!" or the much more subtle "There you go again, Gary. Don't you think it's about time you showed some initiative around here?"

In fact, this is a common, yet absolutely critical, point of choice for any manager. Does Sally or does she not choose to assume responsibility for making Gary change his behavior and attitude? She does when she decides to challenge the resistance by overpowering it or manipulating Gary with guilt or threats.

Tempting as it might be, this approach does not really accomplish what Sally, the leader, wants. It might generate Gary's short-term compliance but what she sacrifices is his longer-term commitment, creativity and productivity. By trying to make the resister do her bidding she will shift herself into the parent position and maneuver him into the role of the child.

In Gestalt psychology this situation is called the "**Top Dog/Under Dog**" dynamic. The Top Dog is the boss, the master, the authority figure, the one who seeks a certain behavior from the other

person. The Under Dog is the—ostensibly—powerless one, the slave, the victim and the one from whom the behavior is being demanded. But who has the real power in the long run? The Under Dog does. It is he/she who ultimately determines whether or not cooperation will be forthcoming.

So, if browbeating a resister just heightens the resistant force, what's a leader to do? The answer lies in understanding what the Under Dog truly wants. The resisting Under Dog wants to be acknowledged, to be heard, to have his or her point-of-view honored—not necessarily agreed with.

This last point is critical for leaders to grasp. When someone resists your will no one expects you to just cave in and abdicate your responsibility for performance results. At the same time, if you can make the resister feel heard and truly understood by you, he/she will be more inclined to consider your position and buy into it. Remember, one of Stephen Covey's famous "7 Habits" is "Seek first to understand and then be understood."

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Here is a "cutting edge" approach that draws from both Gestalt psychology and the martial art of Aikido. I call this the **4 + 2 Method**. There are six steps: the first four focus you on the other person. With the last two you assert your own needs.

1. *Consciously acknowledge to yourself that you are encountering resistance.*

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2. *Center yourself.* (Use deep breathing or even a brief meditation, if you have time.)
 3. *In your own mind, consciously grant them permission to take the position they are adopting.*
 4. *Explore, investigate, become curious about their resistance.* (Use questions to find out about the source of their opposition.)
 5. *Declare your own perceptions, expectations, requirements and rationale.*

6. *Resolve/decide/act as you see fit.* (Here you exercise your ultimate responsibility for performance results.)

Try it out on the next time you encounter a low-risk situation of resistance. Notice the response of the resister and how your own stress is reduced. With practice you will be surprised at how often you turn resistance into genuine support.

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