



## What is Resistance?

In psychology, this refers to people experiencing emotional anxiety caused by the prospect of transformation or change.

## Why do we resist change?

from: <https://bethechangeasph.com>

*Not all changes lead to improvement, but all improvement requires change*

We know that it is vital to have people on board with the changes we want to make, but sometimes we assume that it is enough to be really clear about the end goal and to communicate and support them throughout a change.

That's a good start, but there's much more to it.

For example, changing behaviors requires both [process changes and culture changes](#). If we use hand washing as an example...

- Changing the way people actually clean their hands would be a process change
- Changing people's attitudes toward hand hygiene would be a culture change

A few points to remember:

1. Changing opinions and culture will not necessarily result in process improvement.
2. But if an improvement team focuses all its efforts on process change only, behavior and outcomes are unlikely to shift as well.
3. Process change and culture change must work together to achieve improved performance.
4. While one does not always accompany the other, both are critical to achieve success.



**We also need to understand what motivates people to change and why people resist change, in order to be able to improve our chances of success.**

**It can be tempting to see resistance to change as an obstacle** and to find ways to work around it. But it is important to understand that resistance is a normal psychological reaction to change, is important to understand why people might naturally be resistant, and to address the people factors from the outset.

**Don't assume that resistance to change is necessarily about opposition to the end goal – it may just as easily be about the process of getting there.**

**Resistance to change is actually very normal.** Some reasons for it stem from how our brains are hardwired (the neuronal reasons); some stem from our psychological needs; some stem from our sociological needs; and some reasons are just that we might not like the practical effect a change might have on us.

Be sure to think about each of these factors. By acknowledging them, listening for them, and observing carefully throughout – we can help to reduce the impact of these on the change we are trying to make and/or invite.



## Why Resistance Can Be Our Friend

Because it's how we are wired.

Resistance means that, despite being highly motivated, with the best intentions, we fight change at a psychological level. To make the process more difficult, we may not be aware of our resistance because it happens at a subconscious level.

When we experience something new, different, or unusual, the prefrontal cortex area of our brain lights up. This part of the brain processes ideas, perceptions, and logistics and is highly energy-intensive-and can only process a certain amount of data at a time.

When the work it's asked to do intensifies, the result can be [cognitive fatigue](#).

We are also hardwired to resist change. Part of the brain—the [amygdala](#)—interprets change as a threat and releases the hormones for fear, fight, or flight. Your body is actually protecting you from change, and at times, even when the change is good and desired.

That is why so many people, when presented with a new idea—even a good one, with tons of benefits—will resist it.

## How to Spot Resistance

Often, we are tempted to think resistance is overt. Keep in mind, silence and withholding can also be an equal sign of resistance.

- Silence
- Withholding
- Changing the subject
- Wanting to discuss only ideas, not experiences
- Denial



- Defensiveness
- Anger / Appearing argumentative
- Arrogance
- Over-spiritualizing topics of discussion

**Enter into resistance with kindness, curiosity and empathy.**

The temptation can be to become defensive and battle back when confronted with resistance. But responding with kindness, curiosity and empathy is much more likely to lead to healing and improved experience for all.

**Responding with curiosity and empathy:**

- Thank you for sharing. That is helpful information.
- I'm glad you said that. It helps me to understand what your concerns & questions are.
- I hear you saying \_\_\_\_\_ and that makes sense. (*normalizing*)

**Questions of curiosity:**

- I wonder what you sense your community might need from God right now.
- Do you have a sense of what the Lord might be offering your community?
- In what ways do the needs/desires of your community compliment your needs/desires?

**Inviting through questions:**

- Asking questions is a powerful tool in inviting others into a season with God of self-discovery. Interpreting for them on what their problem may be, or offering how to improve or change, tends to distract from the process.
- Should resistance present as a power struggle against these invitations, chose to move toward curiosity instead of frustration.
- Behind resistance is fear, a need to feel in control, trust issues or feeling forced to do something. Questions are a wonderful way to reduce the friction fear and control create.