

## Who's the Boss? 5 Ways to Stay on Top

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**H**ow many times have you heard that refrain at your staff meetings when you try to solicit some input or feedback concerning a change or transition? In the extreme, a psychologist may call it passive-aggressive behavior; in daily operations, however, it often indicates resistance to a change.

Because ITIL® suggests that IT is an agent of change, this attitude can put IT even farther behind the curve as it struggles with its own internal issues.

Very seldom does an employee not want change. It is just that, like all of us, employees want someone else to change. When that change strikes home and affects how the employee does her or her job, that is when many employees lose confidence and throw up the "it will never work that way" defense.

That is also when an astute manager understands that the employee's experience with the present system has given him a unique perspective on the change in the context of what it will take to get it done. This manager then sets the ball rolling to help the employee elaborate on what will make the change work.

### Manage the Transition

The ITIL Service Transition volume references Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who identifies 10 reasons why individuals resist change:

1. **Loss of control** - moving from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one;
2. **Excessive personal uncertainty** - "What does it mean to me?";
3. **Surprises** - people like to be able to think through a change before proceeding;
4. **The 'Difference Effect'** - changing identifies that surround the work environment;
5. **Loss of face** - moving into an area where they may be perceived as incompetent;
6. **Fear around competence** - they individual does not believe he/she can do the new job;<
7. **Ripples** - unexpected effect of an action in one area on another;
8. **Increase in workload** - change frequently results in more work;
9. **Past resentments** - if change is associated with person or organization who individual has a grievance with;
10. **Real threats** - the change will truly have a negative impact on the individual.

What does the skillful manager do when facing resistance to change from within?

1. **Listen.** This is number one on anybody's list for dealing with resistance. Why does the employee feel this way? Did the design overlook some issue that the employee deals with every day? Does the employee feel as though the change is dumping much added responsibility and work tasks on him? Does the change look as though the employee's skills will be no longer needed or be devalued?  
Furthermore, for years we have known that the act of active listening has an almost magical way of making the talker's troubles disappear.

2. **Communicate Both Ways.** The word ‘communicate’ stems from the verb ‘commune,’ an interchange of ideas or sentiments. Too often in our electronically charged world, we have forgotten the interchange part and rely solely on outgoing messaging to impart information. That is not communication; at best, it is a broadcast message to a community of interest.

The managerial lesson here is that an effective communications plan, perhaps including workshops, team meetings, and face-to-face stakeholder meetings, contributes directly to making a better-informed and less-resistant employee. ITIL Service Transition establishes a Communication Path that aligns different types and objectives of communications with the different stages of a transition.

3. **Involve the Employee.** The ITIL Service Transition volume also suggests empowering a resistant staff member with the authority to take appropriate actions. To make that successful, however, the manager must consider the employee’s current workload, reallocating what is necessary to give the employee the opportunity to work on the issue.

Outdoor leaders have used this technique for years and routinely put a slow hiker at the head of the pack. This not only paces the group so that the slow person does not fall farther behind, but it also tends to pick up the pace as the slower hiker finds strength and energy he did not know he possessed.

4. **Foster a Collaborative Environment.** Collaboration is the process of working together. We all come to the workplace with degrees, certifications, skill sets, and experience, but how many of us have ever taken a course in teamwork. Some endeavors, such as athletic teams and the military, stress teamwork. The rest of us, however, have to learn it on the fly – and there is no syllabus.

Organizations that are not accustomed to full collaboration may find that they do have some departments and teams who are collaborating and who can help facilitate similar collaborative efforts elsewhere within the organization. If your management approach is a bit too much on the “intimidator” side to facilitate free and open collaboration, consider borrowing someone with those skills from another part of the organization.

5. **Give Recognition.** If listen is the first rule of overcoming resistance, giving recognition is the final rule. Recognition can be in the form of noting the employee’s reservations about the plan to help generate collaborative discussions among other staff members. This also, by the way, involves the employee in supporting his thoughts and letting him know that you have listened seriously to him.

Recognition can also be in the form of a reference to the employee’s initiative for any follow-on projects or modifications to the plans.

## Summary

Failure to deal with internal resistance to change takes a manager out of the driver’s seat. To avoid this, as well as its associated undesirable effects on the transition (or the discovery of legitimate issues), be on the lookout for indications of resistance and take the above steps to bring it back into control. You are the boss.