

THE HANDLING RESISTANCE POCKETBOOK

By Dr Mike Clayton

Drawings by Phil Hailstone

"Using thought-provoking frameworks supported with examples and insightful asides, Mike Clayton brings his talent for providing clarity to a challenging and essential topic. Anyone seeking to influence or lead change will benefit greatly from this work."

**Nick Alcock, Corporate Learning & Organisation Development Manager,
Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea**

"A handy resource of tools and hints, relevant to virtually all walks of life. Practical without taking itself too seriously!"

Mark Holmes, Deputy Director, UK Department for Business, Innovation & Skills

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UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE

RESISTANCE IS INEVITABLE



New ideas, challenging propositions and suggested changes in circumstances all evoke some form of startle response, such as an intake of breath, a mental freeze or a look of horror.

This is our reflex response to **threat**: first *fright*, then either *fight or flight*. The ancient parts of the brain kick in and try to protect us, so the next reaction you'll observe in someone faced with a new idea or the need to change will be irrational and defensive, driven by emotion. If the idea, proposal or change is seen as threatening, that emotion can be powerful – you might expect any of anger, sadness, bitterness, frustration or fear.

But being rational creatures, our emotion will subside. It may be quick in some circumstances and can take a long time in others but, inevitably, what will follow will be reason. We will rationalise our initial response with a dozen good reasons why the idea, proposal or change is wrong, stupid or downright dangerous. This is **resistance**.

Resistance is inevitable. It is hard wired into us, like hunger, sleep and sex.

UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE

RESISTANCE IS INEVITABLE

... SO EMBRACE IT



Don't take resistance as a negative thing: accept it as a part of the process: welcome it, embrace it, and engage with it positively.

'We resist only what is inevitable'

Henry Miller

Otherwise, you will find yourself pursuing one of these natural, but pointless responses:

1. You **shoot the messenger** – you behave vindictively when you feel the resistance as a personal attack.
2. You apply the **super-tanker** approach of ignoring the resistance – you keep on going and mow down anything in your path.
3. You argue until you are **blue in the face** – you adopt one argument and use it inflexibly until either your resister, or you yourself, is totally exhausted.

UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE

RESISTANCE IS INEVITABLE

... SO EMBRACE IT (CONT'D)



4. You take the **just-for-me** approach of tugging at heartstrings and appealing to old loyalties.
5. You try your hand at **bunko**, using sleight of hand and manipulation to hide what you are saying and make it appear more palatable.
6. You become a **street-trader** and try to do deals, trading favours for compliance.
7. Or you become a **street-thug**, resorting to threats and intimidation.
8. Or, if all that seems too hard, you just roll over and **play dead**.

This is not a resourceful set of techniques, so let's leave them behind. None of them puts you in control – which is where you want to be. And you know well that if you do ignore the resistance, it will not go away. So you have to turn to the only tenable approach.

You have to engage with the resistance.

UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE

THE ONION MODEL



If you want to engage positively with resistance and handle it effectively, you must first understand it.

Resistance is like an onion

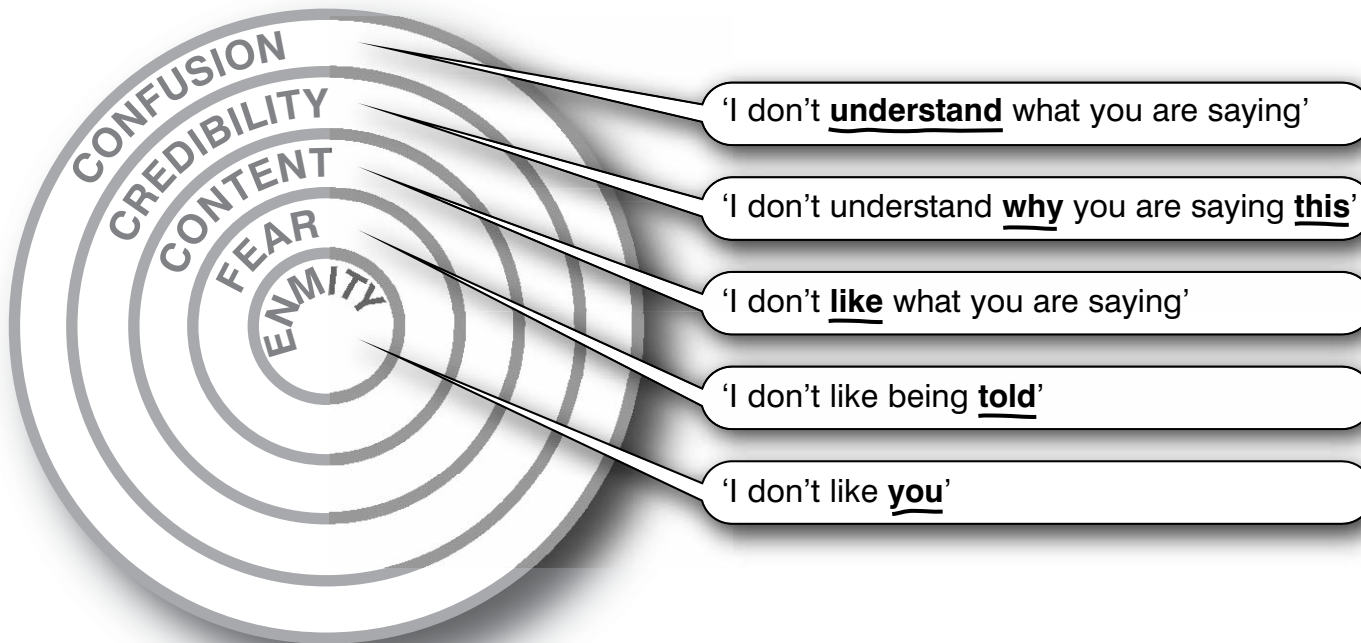
Whenever you have handled one layer of resistance, there always seems to be another layer beneath it. And that layer will always seem hotter and harder to handle than the last. Some would even say that, as you peel away the layers, the onion can make you cry.

The layers of the onion start simply, with confusion and misunderstanding, which can be addressed by improving your communication. The levels get hotter as we descend, because they are more personal and internally driven. The scope of the resistance moves from understanding to real resistance, passing through a fear-driven visceral reaction to arrive, finally, at an irrational hostility based on history, not the matter at hand at all.



UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE

THE ONION MODEL



UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE

THE ONION MODEL



Understanding removes fear. The Onion Model gives you a powerful way to understand the different types of resistance. Once you understand what you are dealing with, your fear should be reduced, and you can select the right tools to handle that resistance effectively.

1. The outermost layer is driven by **confusion** and a lack of understanding of the context.
2. The second layer is driven by a failure to communicate specific details and therefore establish the **credibility** of your idea.
3. The third layer is the most important. This is where the real objection to the **content** of your proposition lies.
4. The fourth layer is where your proposition is rejected – not because you are not right; it's at a deeper psychological level of 'I'm not comfortable with you being right'. This layer is driven by **fear**.
5. The innermost layer is irrational. It is not driven by the reality of the situation but by perception, often historic, creating a feeling of hostility; **enmity**.

Let's look at the layers one at a time, identifying the issues involved at each level of resistance, and some initial ideas for addressing them.

UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE



I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE SAYING

The first response you often hear is something like, '*I don't understand what you are saying*'. This form of resistance is all about **confusion**.

The simplest interpretation of this would be to take the statement at face value and explain your point again, more clearly. This means figuring out how the other person best takes in information – see page 44 – and delivering your message in that way. Then again, they may think they know what you mean, but their interpretation is not what you intended. Their understanding of what you mean is different from yours. This can be hard to spot, but when you do, you'll get an '*aha*' moment.

When I was little, my piggy bank got full up so my dad, a wise man, recommended a Post Office savings account. He explained *interest* and, being bright, I got it quickly. But being bright, I also knew already that you don't get anything for nothing in this world, so I thought the Post Office would take a little money away from me every month. I didn't understand *why* my dad would suggest that: my piggy never took any money away.



UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE



I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE SAYING



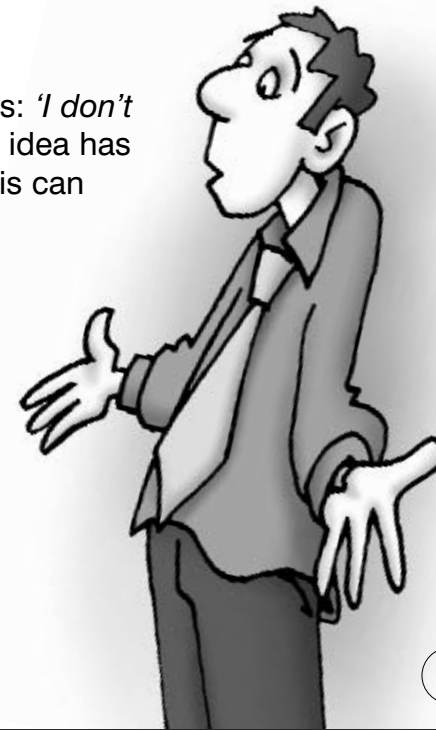
The how ...

Another source of resistance that this statement can signify is: '*I don't understand **how** to do what you are saying*'. They know your idea has consequences, but cannot figure out what happens next. This can lead to a feeling of impotence, which you can address in a straightforward way by setting out the implications of your proposal in easy-to-follow, simple steps.

...and the why

The final form to consider is when they say: '*I don't understand **why** you would say this*'. In this case, there is a logical gap for them between what they already know and the point you are trying to make. Your job is to identify that gap and create a complete bridge.

The answer '*because I say so*' works no better with adults than it does with children.



UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE



I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU ARE SAYING THIS

The second layer of the onion: '*I don't understand why you are saying this*', is harder to handle, because it is not caused simply by a failure in communication. This layer of the model is about **credibility**.

Your first concern must be your own credibility – are they doubting **you**? The way you present your case and, indeed, the way you present yourself must carry authority. Prepare well, so that you have the confidence it takes to inspire, and don't give away your power through a thoughtless lack of attention to the details of things like your posture, expression and dress.

Next, consider your **evidence**. It may not be convincing. There may not be enough of it to persuade them, or what there is may come across as flawed. Look for problems with:

- The data and facts – how much, which selection, reliability
- How you have interpreted them – the logic of your analysis

UNDERSTANDING RESISTANCE



I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU ARE SAYING THIS

Even if your facts and logic check out with the resister, they may not find the way you have presented your case compelling and persuasive. Have you focused sufficiently on what is important to them? Some people need facts and figures; while others need to talk to people to be persuaded. Others need to see things with their own eyes and some need to experience things for themselves and test out the evidence first hand.

Evidence is not enough

Have you ever been right, known you're right and had a really convincing logical reason why you're right, and still not won your case?

Of course you have. And the reason is the big E: Emotion. That's why we do things. Sometimes evidence is not what people need; they need time and a motive to believe what you are saying.

For them, you must answer the most important question of all: ***'What's in it for me?'***

About the Author

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Mike is a freelance speaker, advisor and trainer. He has worked with organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors, helping managers to improve their communication, leadership and management skills. He specialises in project and change management, and in communicating to influence. Handling Resistance is his second Management Pocketbook.



Mike has spent a lot of his professional life engaging with resistance to change, and in selling services across 20 years of consulting, training and coaching. As a speaker and author, he welcomes the chance to debate his ideas, believing that this is how we often learn. Mike has been a Senior Manager at Deloitte and is a Director of Kent Trainers.

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