

Facing resistance to change the dark side of your e-learning project

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How is your e-learning project going? Well I hope! However, I would not be surprised if you are facing issues. Everyone does. Are you losing some sleep? Dreading some meetings? Wondering why you are working so hard? Wondering what the future holds? Are you facing these issues or avoiding them? Are you afraid to face resistance to change -- the dark side of many e-learning projects? Are you hoping that resistance will go away with time?

Keys to dealing with resistance to change

There are two keys to dealing with resistance to change: championing and communicating. I've prepared a list of tips below to help you with this. However, this is not a "to do" list. It is a "to be" list. In the chaotic world of e-learning implementation, you never know what you will be required to produce. Mastering the e-learning process is more about being a leader than following a prescribed checklist. It's about being present, attuned to the moment and drawing from a bank of ideas.

Championing change

When championing change, it's important to:

Be consistent. When you lead an organization into e-learning, colleagues and clients will expect you to be predictable, dependable and in sync with their behaviour. Good champions are consistent in what they say and what they do.

Be flexible. As an effective leader you need to be able to balance consistency with flexibility. When you recognize an issue, you might need to take a new direction. When you reset your sails, you need to explain why you selected the new direction.

Encourage frank discussion. Dissension is not bad in itself. Leaders of e-learning need to create a safe place for opposing ideas to be expressed. Better to bring them out and to try to deal with conflicting ideas than to force them underground to fester.

Enliven issues. The difference between a good e-learning champion and a great one is that a great one has a calling: to make issues come alive for people. When you enliven issues you exude energy, concern and enthusiasm. Your leadership helps attune people to the essential reality of the project.

Know the organization's biases. When approaching stakeholders with a proposal for e-learning, bear in mind their past experience. For example, stakeholders might be skeptical about technological innovation. Their skepticism might stem from involvement in a failed IT implementation or from another negative experience. An effective champion anticipates the resistance of stakeholders and addresses them.

Network. Partnerships may be available to you. Other leaders and trainers you meet or speak to at conferences or associations will be able to offer suggestions. Use your network.

Promote the program. You will know that stakeholders are ready to embrace e-learning when they are ready to take the time to talk to you. Exploit these opportunities when they occur. Report positively on your progress, and promote, promote, promote.

Remain positive. Most people want you to succeed. They might lack the tools, the knowledge and the structures to implement e-learning. Help them acquire what they need.

Take initiative. E-learning success is a product of hard work and facing up to issues. When you identify a potential risk to your project, watch it carefully, identify ownership and do what you can do to mitigate the risk.

Use consistent e-learning terminology. Teach e-learning terms to others and encourage them to use them consistently. A shared language will help people understand what e-learning is and to communicate with each other.

Leading through communications

One of the most important actions you can take in managing change and championing e-learning is to communicate effectively. Effective communication will help to gain understanding and acceptance of your e-learning program. Plan how you would go about developing a communication strategy. To do this, collect your thoughts around the following:

Which groups need to know about the e-learning program?

What messages does each group need to hear?

What should each group not hear?

When should the messages go to them?

How should the messages be distributed?

Who should be the spokesperson for the messages?

Who should not deliver the messages?

Where do you require assistance to deliver the messages?

Who can help where you require assistance to deliver the messages?

How should you approach people who can help you?

Putting ideas into action

Ideas are good. Action is even better. Many of you are already taking actions in tune with the above ideas, while others may find that these ideas help to utilize the ideas you're not yet using. Still others of you will be thinking about the ideas and asking yourselves where you fit in. If you are in this category, you might like to make yourself a grid and assess yourself against the above criteria. If you do that you are making a huge step in helping e-learning to succeed.

The most helpful thing you can do with these ideas is to absorb them so that you can recall them easily. The best way to absorb them is to read them over and envision yourself using them. Go ahead. Create pictures in your mind. Have some fun. Later, when you are faced with an issue, you will be able to call on the ideas presented here to help you face resistance to change.

Championing and communication are two words that most of us use. Now you have a better idea of how they apply to e-learning.

How are you facing the dark side of the resistance to change? What works for you? I'd love to hear from you. So let me know what you are up to. Send me items to add to those presented here. I'll include them in a later article.