

## // Winning the Battle of the “Budge”

### Overcoming Individual Resistance to Change

As you wander back to your office, you can't quit thinking about the exchange you just experienced with a person you very much need to help you implement your new idea. As you explained your new idea or initiative they responded very negatively. It degenerated into a real test of wills which is the last thing you wanted or expected. It is very clear that the individual you really need be successful is firmly ensconced in his/her trench and you are now bewildered and a little bit discouraged. You wonder “why can't they see the logic of my position?” “Why can't they see the value?” “How did that situation ‘blow up’ so quickly”? Could you have said or done anything differently that would have made a difference? The only thing you are sure of is that the other person is not going to “budge” an inch and you can't afford to fail! You my friend have just experienced the “Battle of the Budge” and the end of round one certainly seems to have resulted in a failure!



You need this person in order for your effort to succeed but they do not want anything to do with you or your idea! We far too often believe that the value or the sheer logic of our ideas is all it should take to adopt them. Nothing could be further from the truth! I've lost track of the number of times I've worked with an organization only to have multiple people tell me “I've had that idea long before this event. Nobody paid attention”. Here's the hard truth: nobody is going to embrace your idea just because you had it! That was the easy part! Nothing is more common than a good idea. However, few things are rarer than a good idea that gets fully implemented into a successful conclusion. That's because the hard work is not in thinking of the idea...it's in influencing the right people to make it happen and doing the hard work to sustain it through the journey.

#### **You're Both “In The Ditch”**

The conflict, disagreement, argument, or misunderstanding (you fill in your own descriptive noun) feels like it is one-sided and that you are being more than reasonable. In almost every disagreement I've experienced, my first reaction was to feel like I was being challenged or dismissed out of hand. This is quickly followed by a feeling that they just didn't understand the logic of my position. My response invariably was to “explain” my position (usually louder and more forcefully) to help them “get it”. That almost always made the situation worse. I'm slow...it takes me a long time to catch on sometimes!

Realizing that there are usually good reasons for the other person to resist what you are trying to do is the first step to getting things resolved. I've found that practicing Active Listening or “listening with the willingness to be influenced” is the critical first step. My big mistake is I tend to think I know why the other person is being difficult. I'm usually wrong. Until I'm ready to realize that the other person has a viewpoint and a position that is as logical to them as mine is to me, anything I do or try is going to be met with the same response I've already triggered in my colleague.

#### **It Can't Be Me!**

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You've spent a lot of time and effort formulating your position or perfecting your idea. You have presented it to your counterpart in good faith and with good intentions. You've taken pains to help them understand the benefits to you and the organization and used persuasive logic to make your case. So how can this situation be your fault? At first blush it makes no sense. They are just being stubborn or they want to do this their way and not yours. But is that really the case? Let's look at our own motives and how we presented this in the beginning.

Did we really do our homework? Did we fully understand what the other person needed or wanted out of this situation? Remember, everything we do is a negotiation in life whether in business or in our personal pursuits. Do we really know what our counterpart is looking for out of this effort? Have we triggered a threat to their security or their perceived prestige in the organization by our approach? Have we "cornered" them into thinking they have no other choice? Something we did caused them to "hunker down" and refuse to budge from their position. Seldom is this the response of someone who just wants to be difficult. That response requires real work and few people are willing to put the effort (or risk) into opposing something just for the fun of it. What did we do? What was the perceived message as opposed to what we intended to convey? What was the specific point of contention or the specific concept under discussion when you noticed that they began to react negatively?

Often, when we are brutally honest with ourselves, we find that there is something in the way we delivered the message that created or magnified the negative response to our idea or concept. Perhaps we failed to realize that there is an aspect of our plan that they could have perceived as negatively impacting them, their people, or their organization. Or it may simply be that our explanation was misperceived or misunderstood. The end result is still the same, a "Battle of the Budge"!

### **Understanding the Dynamics**

Anytime two people begin to work together or negotiate with one another, many things come into play. Body language, vocabulary, "history" with each other, politics, position, and "turf" just to name a few. Any or all of these may very well be in play. It is incumbent upon you to figure out what is going on and how best to address it if you want to diffuse this situation and create an ally as opposed to antagonizing or creating an adversary. Never forget: your idea lives or dies by how effectively you influence others to support it!

Your first priority is to evaluate what is going on with the person within the context of your discussion. How is this idea going to change or alter him or her and how is it going to affect their standing in the organization? Is this a threat or a potential negative impact to them or their organization? How did they frame their response to your idea? Sometimes they may not address exactly what they fear for a multitude of reasons. You may have to dig a little to find out what is really going on with them. What was their body language before and after the point of conflict? How did it change? Body language is a key indicator and is oftentimes more accurate than what they actually say. The ability to read the other person's responses is a valuable skill to learn in anyone's career. You also need to understand the Three Levels of Resistance and how they may be in play here. **Level One** says I Don't Understand It. This is a legitimate request for more information and clarity. **Level Two** says I Understand



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It...I Don't Like It! This level requires you to dig much deeper to fully understand what is going on and how you should deal with the situation. **Level Three** says that I Understand It...I Don't Like You! This level requires much more from you in terms of understanding and analysis. Is this due to “history” between you two or is it deeper and more reflexive. You can find more about these three levels and how to deal with them in some of my other papers found on our website.

Write down any and all clues you can develop to gain as much insight as possible into why they have adopted their position. Nothing can be ignored and anything you learn can be a valuable tool in helping you find a way to clear the impasse. Discuss the situation with others who may be able to provide you with insight or information you need. Avoid at all costs the perception that you are plotting and scheming! There is a major difference in doing due diligence and manipulation. Know the difference.

### **Evaluating Your Approach**

It should be obvious to even the most casual of observers that your approach in your initial meeting didn't work so well. What we've discussed in the last two sections should now be used to evaluate what went wrong and why. Remember, it's your idea or concept you are trying to implement so it's still up to you to do the hard work of making this happen! How did you structure your argument? What did you say and how did you say it? Is there a “history” between the two of you that may play a bigger role than you initially thought? Knowing what you know now, what should you have done differently and why?

With all that you've now learned, how are you going to approach “round two”? How are you going to address the outcome of “round one”? What you say in the first 30 seconds will play the deciding role in whether your new approach is going to turn out differently than your last encounter. It is well worth your time to work out your opening statements and rehearse them if need be. Occasionally, you may need to talk about the “elephant in the room”. If that is the case, work out how you bring the subject up and how you are going to deal with it. Ignoring uncomfortable subjects or situations seldom works in resolving them. Deal with it honestly openly, and with as little emotion as possible. Ensure that both of you fully understand the others position. This is often easier said than done.

A lot has been written about the need to “walk a mile in the other person's shoes”. That's because it is true! Take the time to develop an agree/disagree list from your counterpart's perspective. List all the things you know they would gain from this idea and all the things they would view as negative. This exercise can be very instructive to you in that the harder it is for you to do this, the easier it is to understand why you got into the situation to begin with. If you can't accomplish this task, you now know you have more work to do in understanding the dynamics. Learning how to look at the situation from another's perspective is not only worth while, it may give you insight into how to improve or modify your original idea that will make it more successful or easier to sell to others.

### **Win Together or You Both Go Down In Flames**

According to Lanny Bassham, Olympic Gold Medalist, in order to obtain something you want, you must first provide someone else something they want. Far too many people view negotiations and the give and take of daily business as a true battlefield where they must win at all costs. Nothing could be further from the truth. No one can succeed by themselves for long in an organization. Learning how to create win-win situations is a critical skill that becomes increasingly more important the higher you move in the organization.

You have to develop a strategy that effectively addresses their concerns and still achieves your objectives and goals. Understanding your counterpart and their position gives you the insight you need to figure out a way to help you both achieve what you're looking for. Compromise is only a dirty word if it is your principles you are compromising. Learn what they need and what you can offer. Knowing what "chips" you can trade and when to offer them is critical. If you have done your homework, you will know what they want and what they need as well as what you want and what you need. You will know what you can offer, and how effective each "chip" will be in reaching a mutually agreeable position. Do not fall into the trap of offering a major "chip" too soon! Start with the smaller, less significant "chips" first so that you can use your major offers when they really matter.



### **“What If?”**

No Commander ever enters the battlefield without first understanding his or her contingency plans. He or she will know ahead of time what they are going to do for every significant possibility. They also will have trained themselves and their people how to improvise, adapt, and overcome. After all, Rigid Flexibility Is the Key to Success<sup>®</sup>! While you are not in a war (although at times it may seem like it!), you are in a situation that is fluid and somewhat unpredictable. Thinking through your possibilities is a very good idea. No one can know exactly how any conversation or discussion will progress, but thinking through the likely scenarios will provide you with insight and preparation that will help you ensure you stay on track and keep your surprises to a minimum.

### **Re-engaging The Discussion**

No one wants to (or should want to) go through another painful argument or rehash old ground. Your preparation and your efforts should provide you with a way to establish a different conversation with your counterpart that acknowledges his or her initial concerns. Be sure to provide them with specific information and insight that addresses the issues in a way that they see the value in your approach. Taking the time to truly understand why they have taken the position they have is only the first part. Now you have to structure the conversation in such a way that moves past those issues and solves their concerns in a manner that still allows you to achieve your objectives. Spend enough time learning their perspective that you can place yourself in their comfort zone instead of dragging them into yours. Spend some time learning about their personality type and what approach is effective for them and how they view the world.

### **Evaluating Success**

In the world of management, there are few feelings as good as the one you get from knowing you accomplished something major and that you were instrumental in working through a tough situation that directly benefits you, your counterpart, and the organization. If it was easy anybody could do it! Learning how to work your way through tough personality driven issues is not easy. But it is a skill every manager must learn to accomplish at some point in his or her career. Understanding that “brute force” may be the quick and easy short-term fix that may come with considerable long-term costs is a major learning



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point each of us must come to as we learn more about human behavior and the dynamics of change.

We often focus too much attention on “hard skills” and the training to teach them. We must remember to also focus as much attention on the “soft skills” we need to be truly successful as we mold and shape organizations and develop new capabilities while driving World-Class Performance in all that we do! If you find one thing in this paper that helps you accomplish your goals or resolves a conflict, it will have been worth your time to read. I leave you with this thought:

If you really want to do something, you’ll find a way; if you don’t, you’ll find an excuse!  
Anonymous

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Lanny Bassham quote: “With Winning in Mind”, BookPartners, Inc. page 50