RESISTANCE

The Fear Factor in Influence:
Join Before Leading

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Understanding someone's needs and decision criteria is necessary — but not sufficient. If your idea will change their world, you are also dealing with fear.

You've thought through how to approach your boss, your colleague, your partner. You have put together a solid and logical case that should meet their decision criteria. You have made an effort to understand their needs and believe you can show them that your idea will meet those needs beautifully. Somehow, though, your case falls flat. They give you a polite excuse, a rational-sounding rebuttal, an angry dismissal, or simply avoid responding at all. You're puzzled and disappointed. It's tempting to assume that they are simply resistant to change or to believe that they are being unreasonable. Of course, that often leads to a sense of futility, to giving up on that idea or that person's potential support.

Understanding others' needs and decision criteria is necessary, but not sufficient, if you have a big idea to sell. People that are successful at influencing others are also attuned to the fear factor. If your idea is going to change the other person's world, require significant risk, or move very far beyond current boundaries, it has the potential to stimulate fear, uncertainty, and a focus on worst-case scenarios.

Fear doesn't respond to logic

Fear doesn't respond well to logic, no matter how solid the argument. It can't easily be traded away. Positive visions and potential rewards may get a polite nod or smile, but the fear won't dissipate in response.

What Aikido taught me

I spent several years studying and practicing the Japanese martial art of Aikido. Though I never mastered the physical side of it, the approach and philosophy became an important part of my thinking. The word, Aikido, is variously translated as "the way to universal harmony" or "the way to harmony with the universe." Either way, both the physical and mental dynamic is that of moving with or joining the other before taking the lead.

How to join someone who is afraid

If you believe the person you're hoping to influence is experiencing fear – fear of loss, of failure, of diminishment – think about how to join that person. Instead of arguing, listen actively. Instead of assuming their first response is a barrier you must overcome, draw them out, and go deeper to learn more about their concerns. Treat the resistance and underlying fear as sources of information that can help you understand how you need to change your approach to align more closely to that person. Treat any fear you uncover as rational and legitimate (even if you disagree); don't try to deny the possibility of loss for that person. Don't stop until the other has acknowledged, verbally or nonverbally, that you understand. Only then are you in a position to talk about how you might, together, be able to reduce the risk or deal with the worst case, should it occur.

When another's fear can mean a loss of support for something you believe in, you need to be aware of your own emotions and temporarily set aside your own enthusiasm, confidence, perspective and negative judgment. Follow these simple reminders for successfully overcoming the "fear factor":

> THREE SIMPLE REMINDERS
>
> - Ask before assuming.
> - Listen before talking.
> - Join before leading.

These guidelines will help you move ahead together to create a mutually beneficial outcome.

Ask before assuming. Listen before talking. Join before leading.

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Founder of **The Influence Guru**, Kim Barnes is a coach, facilitator, and author with more than forty years of experience in leadership, influence, and organization development. She was a founder and, for many years, CEO of Barnes & Conti Associates, and developed or co-developed programs including *Exercising Influence*, *Inspirational Leadership*, *Intelligent Risk-Taking*, *Consulting on the Inside*, and *Managing Innovation*. She is the author of six books, including *Exercising Influence* (Wiley) and *Building Better Ideas* (Berrett-Koehler). She works with enterprise companies, government agencies, small businesses, and individuals from the San Francisco Bay Area.

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