



5 Ways Even Great Leaders Create Resistance to Change

...and what to do about it

Dear Healthcare Leader,

Did you know that most healthcare leaders interact with their teams according to **outdated beliefs** about what makes people tick? **New discoveries about human behavior** reveal that many of these beliefs aren't actually true.

The problem with sticking to **beliefs that aren't true** is they keep us in a false reality. Due to a phenomenon called **confirmation bias**, our brains have a tendency to **notice what we expect to see**, and then we react in ways that confirm our beliefs.

For example, research shows that teachers who think students are destined for success (because they are randomly labelled "high potential") become successful. Sadly, the opposite is also true. When teachers think students are destined for failure (randomly labelled "low potential"), they become less successful. This happens because the teachers relate to the students according to their **expectations about them**, which subsequently affects how students **see themselves** and, in turn, **how they behave** with the students.

Bottom line: We see what we believe. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In this report you'll learn the **top five core beliefs that create resistance**. These beliefs, when noticed and adjusted, will not only **change the way you respond to resistance**, but it will also **greatly influence the way your team responds to you**.

Hi! I'm Mara Zabari, and I help healthcare leaders create highly engaging work environments. This became my personal mission after I seriously considered leaving nursing early in my career because my work environment was so demotivating. But, instead of leaving, I decided to learn all that I could about group behavior in organizations – **what causes teams to come alive and what beats them down**. I applied what I was learning to my leadership and started seeing great results: **High physician and staff engagement** and **clinical outcomes in the top rankings**.

My biggest "Aha" was when I realized that my beliefs determined my reality, and **if I could change my beliefs, I could also change my reality**.



This insight was especially impactful with **how I dealt with resisters to change**. Once I changed how I thought about them, my behavior changed, which then changed how they behaved. In fact, many of these so called **resisters became some of the greatest advocates for the change initiatives** in my departments.

So, now let's take a look at the **5 Ways Even Great Leaders Create Resistance to Change...and what to do about it**

1) **The belief:** People are resistant to change.

In our culture this belief is so ingrained it's considered a time honored truth. However, just like the teachers who determine the success of their students based on how they are labeled, **when we believe people will resist change, they will.**

What leaders do: When leaders **believe** people are resistant to change, they plan on it and will plot ways to get around it, like overemphasizing the positive aspects of the change and underemphasizing any challenges to their teams. The problem is this behavior comes across as manipulative and imposing and creates pushback and cynicism which reinforces the leader's belief about resistance to change.

What to do about it: Although the belief that people are resistant to change has been around a long time, the truth is **people are actually wired for change**. It's in our DNA. People change all of the time... **when they want to change**. People resist change when they perceive it is **imposed** on them.

To change this self-fulfilling prophecy, try on the **new belief that people are wired for change** and behave in accordance. Get excited about **bringing forward change ideas** to your teams, presenting both the positive and the challenging aspects. Practicing this leadership skill will not only allow you to garner more credibility with your team, it will cause team members to get involved and offer suggestions on how to address the challenges.

2) **The belief:** "Pushback" is a bad thing.

When someone challenges our ideas or plans, we often think of it as a bad thing. But, **it's actually a very good thing** because it means **the person is engaged in the topic** and just has a different point of view.

What leaders do: When leaders get pushback, instead of being curious and spending time exploring the concerns, they often **become defensive** and move into justifications for the



change, which sends the message that **only positive feedback is welcome**. This creates **even more resistance**. However, now, instead of the resistance being expressed openly, it will come out in covert ways that are harder to address, such as passive aggressive behaviors.

What to do about it: First, use the word “**objections**” instead of “pushback.” Whereas pushback carries the negative connotation that the person doesn’t like the idea, **objection** is more neutral and could mean the person likes the overall idea but just has some concerns about it.

Second, **start seeing objections as the good things that they are**. Differences of opinions are **essential for getting to good solutions**. They open up the conversation. Before making any changes, it’s important to know ahead of time what will withstand the adoption process, and what will bring it to its knees. Differences of opinion don’t mean things can’t move forward; it just means concerns need to be worked through. And it is in discussing **those objections together** through open communication that **people will take ownership of the change and ultimately implement the best solutions to the challenges**.

Start by encouraging objections. **Thank people who raise them**, and then instead of defending your idea or plan, **JOIN with the objector’s perspective to drive the conversation forward** (e.g., “I hadn’t thought of that - thank you for bringing it up” or “Let’s explore that further”), and then **quickly move forward to problem solving together** (e.g., “given that concern, what do we need to do to move forward?”).

3) The belief: I have to get people to “buy-in” to my plan.

The term “buy-in” is so widely used we don’t realize **that it connotes we are trying to sell something**. First, **people don’t like to be sold to**, and second, the term in and of itself sets the stage for resistance because it assumes right off the bat that people aren’t going to naturally embrace the idea, which is why it needs to be “sold.”

What leaders do: When leaders come up with ideas for change, or when they are responsible for cascading a change from up above, they will use language that is *convincing* (selling) rather than presenting the idea in a way that it stands on its own merit.

Even if people aren’t conscious that they are being sold to, **they feel it at an unconscious level and will resist**.



What to do about it: The best way to lead change is to **come across authentically without trying to convince people to “buy in.”** Think about how you feel about the change you are presenting, and **present it honestly from your point of view.**

Discuss what you see as the **benefits and downsides of the change.** Identify the **areas where adaptations can be made and areas where it may not be an option.** Invite people to **get involved in the process and watch how much more collaboration takes place.**

4) The belief: I have to have all the answers.

Leaders have been conditioned to believe **if they don't have all the answers, they aren't good leaders.**

What leaders do: Leaders feel compelled to **come up with answers even when they don't have them.** This does two things: first, it **leads to wrong answers,** and second, and even more detrimental, it **doesn't allow others to be part of the problem solving process.**

Leaders alienate others by blocking their opportunities to contribute. This **creates lack of engagement and resistance.**

What to do about it: Although leaders think they have to know everything to be credible leaders, the opposite is actually true. **Helping others discover the answers to questions builds team intelligence** and is the highest expression of leadership.

Invite others to answer questions by saying:

- “I'm not sure, what do you think?”
- “This is what I know, and this is what I don't know. What do you know?”
- “What do we need to do to find the answer to that question?”

5) The belief: I have to be perfect.

This is a **big one for leaders,** and in fact for everyone in healthcare, regardless of their role. The **expectation of perfection** has been internalized from early on through professional training programs and the socialization process.



What leaders do: Leaders are **not used to sharing their mishaps and weaknesses** with their teams. Many think that if they do, **their teams will lose respect for them**, and so give the impression that they get everything right all of the time.

What to do about it: **Change requires experimentation**, which inherently brings failures along with it. This is how we learn. **When failure is not modeled or acknowledged** as part of the change process, **people will resist it** because they will be afraid to risk their reputations.

Did you know that studies have shown the most successful leaders are the ones who **share their fallibilities and express their need for help?** When people see this in a leader, it not only gives them permission to share their own fallibilities and ask for help, but it also gives them an opportunity to contribute and help their leader out.

Considering how **common these 5 beliefs are** it's not surprising there is so much "resistance to change."

The good news is **if our beliefs are responsible for the resistance we are experiencing, we can change them and therefor change our experience.**

It starts with **being aware of the effects of these false beliefs, being open to believing something different**, and then **behaving in a way that matches the new beliefs.**

This process is not hard but it does require intentional consistent action, reflection, and evaluation.

In support of your success!

Mara