Leading
from the
Middle

How It's Different,
Why It Matters

Rick Maurer

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Introduction

Middle managers have it tough -- all of the work and none of the glory. Of course that's an exaggeration, but it can sometimes feel like that, right?

The work is demanding. You may be accountable to many bosses, all of whom have slightly different agendas and priorities. You've got to keep your own staff working productively. . . and, you've got to rely on other managers and professionals down the hall or around the world in order to get your work done.

All of that juggling takes a lot of skill.

Both good news and bad news exists when attempting to lead from the middle. The bad news is that it's harder to lead from the middle of an organization than from any other position. If you're in the middle of an organization, you need to be extremely good at influencing others. You not only need to be able to convince your own team to follow your lead, but you also need to be able to have an effect on the people to whom you report. Having an impact on your counterparts in the organization is equally valuable. In other words, you need the expert ability to be persuasive – up, down, and all around.

The good news is that many of the leadership practices detailed in business books may also be utilized by middle managers.And there are many fine books on leadership readily available. As good as those books are, however, most focus only on executives while disregarding many of the challenges that make your job challenging in unique ways.

I hope you will find that this ebook is a good supplement to the other books, training, and experiences that help shape your own approach to leading from the middle.

I cover four major topics in this book. They are foundation pieces for leading from the middle. You probably have been told to lead a project that wasn't your idea. At the time, you may have even thought that it was **not** a very good idea. Now, however, it's your job to make the project a success. I hope you will consider the topics in this book as you take on leadership of those types of projects.

Reflect before you act. Taking a moment to think about what you plan to do and how you plan to do it can have a huge impact on your level of success.

Influence the people who make the decisions. Finding ways to influence these people – say, asking for more resources – is an essential asset to acquire.

Get your team involved. The importance of member participation speaks for itself.

Build strategic alliances. To lead effectively from the middle, you need to form great working relationships with people all over your organization. Strong bonds will facilitate the ease of getting the help that you need from anywhere.

Only the above four topics will be addressed in this ebook. Standard leadership skills like setting direction, staff development, or conducting meetings and performance reviews will not be covered. Many fine books on management and leadership exist in this market and, undoubtedly, you already have some on your bookshelf. My personal favorite is noted in the Next Steps section.

I.

REFLECT BEFORE YOU ACT

What I mean by "Reflect Before You Act" is take time to sit back and consider what you're about to do before you act.

We, as people, are so action-oriented that it would be easy to pass by this section just to get to "the good stuff." Please don't do that.

I recently watched golf's British Open. Commentators noted that the golfers spend time thinking about the course on which they are about to play, in this case, the Royal Birkdale course. Even though I'm not a golfer, I could tell that this course is extremely demanding with strong winds that can pick up at any moment. Planning how they will approach each swing, therefore, is critical. While playing the game is more fun and engaging, professionals have learned to take the time to plan. That is all I am suggesting that you do.

✔ Just How Motivated Are You to Lead?

The first thing to reflect on is your own level of motivation. In order to lead effectively, you must be motivated to do this specific type of work. There is really no other choice. If you're not motivated, you cannot expect people to follow you. They may achieve mediocre expectations, but will certainly not show inspired or creative performances. You'll get compliance, not commitment.

Suppose that you've just been handed a project that looks like fun. It is challenging in all the ways that you love. You think, "No need to get the team involved, I can do this myself." You close your office door and go to work. The problem is that you have a team to lead. Although you might be able to do this task quickly and brilliantly as an individual, you are doing nothing to help your staff develop the capacity to tackle challenges as a team. And, neither will you be using the resources of that team very well.

If you find yourself hoarding the good assignments or finding ways to "pitch in and help out your staff," it might suggest that you would rather be doing the work on your own rather than managing the work of others.

If that is the case, don't despair. Simply recognize the fact. Awareness affords options. The danger arrives when you work on automatic pilot, and fail to see the potential implications of these decisions.

✔ **Self-Assessment**

Think about your current job as you answer the questions of this quick self-assessment.

1. Which do you prefer more?
   a. doing the work myself
   b. leading others
   c. a little of both

2. Which do you prefer?
   a. getting the job done
   b. helping others develop their skills

There are no right or wrong answers. If you answered "a" to both questions and are in a position of leadership, however, you may want to ask yourself why you are in management. It seems like you would prefer to dig in and do the work and not watch others do it.

But for now, simply notice that you prefer doing the work yourself rather than developing and leading people. You can still be a fine leader, but you will have to work at it.

For starters, pay attention to how you spend your time. Do you complete work on your own or do you lead others? Of course there will be times when you must "roll up your sleeves," but you should continually ask yourself if doing so is the best use of your time. Guiding others to complete the task at hand may be tough for you to do.

If you answered "b" to both questions, you're not off-the-hook. Liking something and being good at it are not necessarily related. Nevertheless, your desire to lead suggests that you are probably motivated to increase your leadership skills.

✔ **Who Needs to Support You?**

As a manager, you need the support of many other people to get your work accomplished successfully. Take a moment to list all those people and groups who need to support you. For now, simply list their names (see Stakeholder Assessment form). Be sure to consider including:
- the people who report to you.
- any other individuals or project teams that you oversee.
- your boss.
- your boss' boss.
- your counterparts in the organization.
- anyone whom you consider a supplier. (The people who work on a project before it gets to you.)
- your customers, both internal and external.

Stakeholder Assessment

Person or Group	Can Count on Their Support Yes, No, Sometimes	To what extent do they have trust and confidence in you? Rate 1 (low) to 10 (high)

✔ Do People Support or Resist You?

Some people seem to do a great job of getting others to go along with them. Time after time, people want to follow them. Others don't fare as well, and find that they are unable to get the support they need to get projects started or completed.

Then, there are those of us who fit uncomfortably in-between success and failure of leadership. Sometimes we are able to get people to go along while at other times, we wonder what went wrong.

After exploring this topic for a number of years, I discovered what I refer to as levels of resistance and support. I found that people show resistance based on three key reasons while, in contrast, they display support rooted in three key reasons. Level one is the easiest, level two is more challenging, and level three is the hardest.

An easy way to remember them is as follows:
- Level 1 = "I don't get it."
- Level 2 = "I don't like it."
- Level 3 = "I don't like you." (This is a bit of an exaggeration, but it is easy to remember. It really means, "I don't have trust and confidence in you for this particular project.")

The good news is that it is the exact opposite of the above that is needed in order to influence effectively. People need to understand what you are saying, and they need to have a favorable emotional reaction to it. Trust and confidence in you are essential factors to acquire.

> My article, "Resistance to Change – Why it Matters and What to do About It," has been included as a resource at the end of this e-book. I urge you to read it right now. It's short, and will only take a few minutes to read. The remainder of the material that follows is built on my thinking about support and resistance to change.

Another aspect of this reflection is in knowing where you stand with the people that you need to influence. As Yogi Berra once said, "You need to have deep depth." You've got to have a deep understanding of the reasons why people might support or resist you.

Think about when you are influenced by someone. They probably combined, consciously or subconsciously, all three of the levels identified earlier. You understand what they are talking about. You lean in, wanting to know more. You trust this person.

When you speak, do people lean in or lean away? I believe that they either lean in and show that they are eager to hear what you have to say, or that they are leaning away whenever we attempt to influence another person. Leaning away could look like boredom, multi-tasking on a BlackBerry, walking away, interrupting, or arguing.

What is key is that we have control over whether people lean in or lean away, if we pay attention to the cues they give us.

Are people likely to say to themselves, "Oh good, she's here," or, "Oh no, not him again!" when you walk into a room?

People who are consistently good at influencing others know the answer to that question. Do you?

An example of a leader who uses all three levels effectively is noteworthy. The head of a very large company, Harry routinely begins management training sessions with an open conversation about his company. No PowerPoint presentations, only him.

Harry knows the industry and his company, and is well-qualified for his job. Questions about product development, competition, and so forth don't stump him. He invites people to voice their concerns by speaking directly with them, and by treating every question with respect. Meetings may start with polite questions, but soon shift to more important emotional issues. Harry handles each encounter with confident professionalism. He does not respond defensively, and does not attack someone who asks a question in an impertinent fashion.

Later, as I work with this group, I often ask, "How many of you had never seen Harry before?"

Most hands rise.

"Imagine that Harry rejoins us right now," I suggest, "and offers the following scenario to you."

"Suppose that he says," I continue, "'Folks, my company has a critical project that desperately needs completion. I haven't had the time to assess the risks or the benefits, but the work must be done. I need several volunteers who would be willing to make a full-time commitment to work with me to see the project through to its end. The work would last from six to nine months.'"

"Would any of you be willing to consider that?" I ask.

A number of hands rise.

Incredulous, I remark, "At Level 1, you don't even know what it is that you will be doing. Neither does Harry. At Level 2, you are completely unaware of any potential risks and benefits that may affect you. Why did you say yes?"

"It is because of him," they reply. "We trust that if Harry is backing a project, it must be reputable. He simply wouldn't make the offer if he didn't believe in its value."

Harry acquired enormous credibility in only a short, one-hour meeting simply by the way that related to the people in attendance. Some may have been aware of Harry's stunning reputation prior to his invitation, but the seminar could have easily been less than successful.

You, too, can build strong Level 3 trust. If people have a strong "Oh no, it's him!" reaction, however, then one meeting will not be sufficient. You must work on building bridges. (Learn more about this in Section 4.)
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✔ Intention

Skills are necessary, but intention is critical. Our intention when we work with others makes all of the difference. If my intention is to get the job done at all costs, my leadership actions will reflect that. If my intention is to lead in a way that balances concern for the task with concern for the people, my guiding actions will be different.

After years of work in management and executive development, I've come to believe that intention is far more important than learning a given set of skills. Leadership skills are important but, without a clear intention of why you need those skills, the knowledge is wasted.

- Think of a project on which you are currently working. According to others, what is your intention?

    _____

- Is that what you want it to be? If not, think of a new sentence that supports the intention you prefer.

    _____

I encourage you to keep your intention in mind as you explore the remaining three topics of this book.

II.

INFLUENCE THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE DECISIONS

The ability to influence the people who make the decisions is a must. This would often be superiors, and my guess is that you listed your boss or other supervisors as key stakeholders. It is key that you determine the status of your relationship with each of these people before you ask anything of them.

Please go back to the Stakehodler Assessment and note the level of support you can expect from each of these individuals or groups. With stakeholders who you believe are not likely to support you, ask what the issues are that work for or against you at all three levels. :

Level 1 They get what you are saying – or they don't.

Level 2 – interested and excited or afraid

Level 3 – Trust and confidence in you – or not?

Four things that you can do to begin to build support for your ideas, new projects, and other changes: :

1. Read Section 4 of this ebook, "Build Strategic Alliances." The ideas presented in that section are exactly the types of things I would suggest if I were coaching you.

2. Be clear about your professional intentions with your superiors. Think about how you want these people to see you, and then align your intentions accordingly. For example, suppose your reputation includes untimely or incomplete work habits. A possible intention statement might read, "My intent is to make sure that I deliver every project on time and with high quality results."

    In another instance, assume that you are in the more difficult situation of having a superior who is easily threatened by assertive subordinates. A potential statement might be, "My intention is to work with integrity and in ways that assure my superior that I am not seeking his/her job."

3. Observe others who consistently produce fine work without posing a threat to superiors. Think about what you can learn from them.

4. Consider using the "Contract Conversation" covered in this section when you need a mutual agreement in order to proceed.

If your scores from the Stakeholder Assessment form are in the middle of the scale, examine those places where you see that your boss doesn't trust you. Often, that relationship is key to your ability to get others working with you.

If your Level 3 relationship with your boss is high -- that's great news. Obviously, you need to keep your eyes open for possible changes in conditions, but enjoy the ride for now.

Create Clear Contracts for Projects

Creating a clear contract with senior people is a very helpful initial step. It doesn't have to be a formal document. It can be done on a napkin, for that matter. What is important is to have a clear conversation that identifies expectations. Doing so will establish the perimeters for completing the task at hand, which will provide comfort to both your superior and yourself. In addition, this meeting does not need to be time consuming.

You need a common understanding of the outcome, so that both of you have the same picture of what success will look like. Robert Mager, who wrote eloquently about writing clear goals and objectives, said it best, "If you meet the goal on the street, would you recognize it?" This is an essential point. If you are moving toward differing goals, problems could easily arise. Success cannot be achieved when priorities are unidentified, deadlines are unconfirmed, and working methods are unnamed.

This type of contract conversation doesn't take place very often, so you must provide the framework for that type of conversation if your superior does not.

Consider the following scenario:

Suppose that you receive an email from your superior requesting that your team create a new e-widget to be ready for marketing soon. Hopefully, you recognize that this request is lacking significant details for you to begin to adequately prepare anything.

Despite many questions, you get started. You make guesses about what you think an e-widget is, what it does, how much it should cost the consumer, and how much it should cost to develop a prototype (in terms of time and materials). Because you were told to create the product "soon," you further speculate that a two-month time period seems like a reasonable deadline.

Although you have tried your best with what information you were given, it was just not enough. All of your work was based entirely on guesses. Being wrong on any of your guesses could be problematic. You need a contract. More simply, you need an agreement, so that both of you are moving toward the same picture of the e-widget at the same speed.

As tempting as it may be to make due with minimal information, you must take the time to align your expectations and product knowledge with those of your superior.

The contract conversation needs to include items like:

- **Vision.** This is the "if you meet it on the street" picture of what your boss wants. It's more than his or her goals, it's the emotional picture. What does success look like, and what does it feel like.

- **Milestones and completion dates.** You need to know when this must be completed, and what the mile markers are that are important to the project. Be sure to listen for the markers that are important to your boss. For example, are there certain aspects of the project that can be completed at any time and others that must be completed immediately. Be sure that you both agree on when things will get done.

- **Resources.** What is it that you need in order to fulfill these target deadlines? You need to talk about people. Maybe your team can do it without assistance, but perhaps you need the resources of somebody else. A top engineer from Chicago who is willing to meet with you on telecoms weekly, or a marketing whiz to be an advisor and on call as you need them may be necessary. Recognize the mentality of "I can do this, and here are the kinds of resources I need in order to do it right."

- **Money.** What is your budget? If you don't already know, find out.

- **Access to your boss.** This will take some planning ahead, especially if your boss is frequently out of the office. If something comes up, determine the best way to connect so that the project is not delayed. Possible methods may include email, text-messaging, contacting an assistant, etc. Work it out at the beginning of the project so that potential issues can be averted.

- **Monitoring progress.** What are the criteria to be used to monitor the progress? Discuss how much information is desired. How frequently is information to be exchanged or discussed – daily/weekly/monthly reports, or upon completion only?

-

- **Protecting your own time.** This is the hardest to talk about, but it is critical. Quite often in organizations, senior leaders get some important idea. They then bump it down to you, they often don't take into consideration your current workload. Most have very busy days filled with previously scheduled projects and commitments.

  G.E. used the following analogy to explain this common situation. A plate spinner (who appeared on TV variety shows) would start a wooden dowel rod spinning, and then place a plate on top of it. While it was spinning, he would add second dowel rod and plate. Then another and another, until it seemed that he couldn't control any more spinning plates. Soon, one of the plates began wobbling. He rushed over to give it another spin, so that he could keep all of the plates spinning successfully at the same time. Adding even one more plate would send the act completely out of control. He knew exactly how many he could handle successfully.

  G.E. suggests that each project manager know how many "plates" their team can handle, and then protects the team's time so that all work can be completed successfully. This requires saying no, and that is a hard thing to do. Too many managers say yes to everything, and then are amazed that their reputation suffers because they couldn't keep everything "spinning" successfully.

The contract conversation might take an hour, or it might take ten minutes. However long it takes, it is essential. Consider the old Fram Oil Filter commercial in which a mechanic stands in front of a car up on a lift. The fact that the car is up on a lift suggests that the repair is a costly one. The mechanic holds up a $10 oil filter and says, "You can pay me now or you can pay me later."

If the project fails, no one is going to say to you, "Well, no wonder it failed, your boss gave poor direction. You can't be blamed." What they will say to others is, "That was a mistake giving the project to her."

Be creative about how you handle the contract conversation. You can do it over the phone, over coffee, walking to a plane, or sitting at a desk. Just do it.

A sample contract is located at the end of this ebook, entitled "Tips for Delegating the Leadership of Change." It will work on just about any assignment or project. Feel free to make copies of it for personal use.

III.

GET YOUR TEAM INVOLVED

A good way to get people involved is to use the three levels of support and resistance to focus the conversation at the beginning of any assignment. ("I don't get it," "I don't like it," and "I don't like you" and their counterparts, "I get it," "I like it," and "I have confidence in you.")

If you consistently focus on these three levels of questions, you make it more and more safe for people to speak candidly. Provided, of course, that you don't retaliate when people do say things that you'd prefer not to hear.

Often, these conversations allow you to talk openly and about passive resistance or inertia. Suppose, for example, that you need members of your team to make a strong commitment to a new project but are concerned that all you will get is malicious compliance. (By the way, that's a phrase a former client used to describe a situation he had faced. I love it.)

To encourage more candid conversations, use the three levels of support and resistance.

- At Level 1, you could ask, "Do you understand the assignment and what is expected of us?" Additional information may need to be provided, or more questions for clarity may exist. The people closest to a particular aspect of the work frequently have very specific questions that you wouldn't have thought to ask, so a direct conversation can be very helpful.

- At Level 2, you may want to uncover the background to emotional reactions of "I like it" or "I don't like it." By identifying current issues, you have the opportunity to learn what could fuel future resistance. This allows the assignment to proceed more smoothly.

  To elaborate, if people say that they feel overworked already and that they don't see the reason behind the assignment of additional work, that's a perfect opportunity for to offer clarity to the situation. Through open conversation, you can discover if the resistance is due to a lack of understanding about the importance of the project (Level 1) or it is something deeper. It may be that more work simply translates as cruel and unusual punishment to an over-extended team.

Hearing these comments gives you instant options. You could:

- Delay the start of the project, or
- Ask for help from your team. A statement like, "Headquarters says we must tackle this new project, and I'm convinced that they're not going to budge. I also know that all of us are working at 100 percent already. Does anyone have a suggestion for what we can do?" Showing an understanding of their position opens the door to solution, and possible options can then be explored together.

    Recognize that taking on a new project may force other current projects to be less of a priority.

    Although there is no guarantee that you will find a great option for dealing with this challenge, just getting everyone involved in tackling the problem can make a difference. At the very least, it increases your credibility and lets people see that you are someone who can be trusted.

Remember that you don't have to have all of the answers. That's why you've got a team. As leader, you are creating the container for the conversation, "We've got to find a way to make this work." You are calling on your collective wisdom and talent to address the challenge.

Don't forget that Level 2 emotional reactions could also be positive. You may hear that "It's about time we did this," or that "It's going to be good for our customers." As a leader, this positive rush of energy let's you know that you have many people ready to take on a worthwhile project, and it's your job to find ways to harness that energy. Bear in mind that you don't have to come up with the ideas. Turn to your team and ask for suggestions on how all of you can make this project a success.

- At Level 3, you must be aware of the team's ability to trust in you as a leader. Unless you already have a great relationship with them, you can't expect open trust. Boldly asking if the team trusts you will accomplish nothing because people will acknowledge trust verbally, even if they don't really feel it. They will not readily announce direct distrust of a superior. Speaking in this manner is simply too dangerous in most workplaces.

    Instead, you could talk about Level 3 as it relates to a specific assignment. Begin an open dialogue by asking what the team needs from you, as their leader. Note that it can sometimes be a challenge to extract this information from people. There are ways to "prime the pump," and get the conversation started.

    One way is to acknowledge and take responsibility for mistakes that you made on previous assignments. You could say, "I did drop the ball on that," or, "Maybe I

delegated too quickly." Your candor makes it a bit easier for people to talk about what they need from you because they realize you are open to hearing their personal feedback.

In the same respect, you can let the team know your expectations of them for the project. If there has been a history of passive resistance from the team, for example, you could specifically address that issue. You could say, "Look, I'm concerned that this team will return to familiar unsuccessful work patterns. If that happens, we will lose the project – and that is something that we cannot afford right now. What can we do together to make sure that doesn't happen?"

Rather than hoping and praying that you don't have passive resistance, you actually talk about it. If you create a history together where you talk openly about how you work together, you make it easier for these conversations to take place.

Obviously, you can't enhance the quality of conversation through the use of blame. These conversations focus on Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 issues. Trust within your team, and trust between the team and you will be built if you can handle the issues well.

Work Toward Clear and Compelling Goals

In the early 1940's, Duke Ellington led one of the best bands in the history of jazz. Many of his recordings from 1940 to 1942 are the finest made in any genre of the Twentieth Century. The band played very well together. They had brilliant soloists. As an ensemble, however, their sound was beyond description.

You might call them a great team. I certainly would. This team performed at an extraordinarily high level, and member turnover was extremely low. (Harry Carney and Johnny Hodges, among others, played with the band for decades.) Despite their immense talent, though, there were long stretches where band members didn't speak to one another. They would ride on the bus together all day, eat meals in the same restaurants, play music together, and yet, some members refused to speak to other members.

So much for teambuilding!

I think it's great for coworkers to like each other. It certainly makes life more enjoyable. I know that I prefer to like the people with whom I work and to have them like me, but it is not the main objective of teams in the workplace. In actuality, the purpose of a team is to get work done.

The main job of a leader is to make sure that:
- goals are exceedingly clear,
- each team member knows his or her role,
- people know how to cooperate in order to get the job done right, and
- people are treated fairly.

That's it. Ellington's band members had absolutely no doubts of the expectations for playing Duke's brilliant compositions. They knew how to blend their individual sounds into one, to vary dynamics as a group, and to support a soloist with precise balance. If it worked for him, maybe that kind of simplicity can work for you too.

I admit that I am cynical about team building. Too many times, I've seen people make promises that they had no intention of fulfilling. Instead, I believe that it is more effective to structure work in a way that requires people to rely on each other.

In order for team building to be successful, there must be a focus placed on how to meet critical goals of a particular project. Leave time for recreation and introductory activities, but be sure that the project centers on the work at hand. The team should leave knowing that significant progress was made on tough business issues, not on establishing empty promises.

Nesting Box Goals

Even more powerful than having clear goals for your team is the embedding of those goals in the overall direction of the organization. An image that easily symbolizes this concept is that of nesting boxes.

Nesting boxes are a decorative set of boxes that fit snugly inside one another. A large corporation uses the image of nesting boxes when they talk about goals. This company first creates a basic vision, values, and strategic goals. Once these foundational aspects have been decided, they are passed on to the other departments of the company to personalize. Each major function develops a vision that fits neatly within the big nesting box until the entire company has contributed to the final product. Everyone can then visualize the full set of newly established nesting boxes that represent the company as a whole.

Problem Solving Tools

Another helpful tactic is to use a problem-solving tool. You likely utilize a particular tool with your team already. If it works, no need to change. If you are in need of a successful way to manage problems that arise, however, try a simple Google search using the key words *problem solving tools*. It is possible to find some helpful tools that are available to use without cost to you. For example, I found the site www.mycoted.com this way. It

contains a number of free problem-solving tools. I also recommend the book *Six Thinking Hats* by Edward DeBono. (See Next Steps for more information on this book.)

Most problem solving tools are pretty straightforward – assess the situation, create clear goals, and then make various decisions throughout the process to achieve the set goals. The magic isn't in using the right tool, rather, it's in having a common team discipline to move through the problems without getting stuck in one place.

Team Assessment

Consider inviting your team to help you complete this team assessment. I have found that linking the assessment to a specific project to be most valuable, rather than asking team members to evaluate all aspects of the work completed together.

Team Assessment

Teams tend to add their own questions to this list, but the five questions below are a good start.

- How clear are we about our goals?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Low									High

- How clear am I about my own role?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Low									High

- To what extent do I trust that others on the team will do their job well?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Low									High

- How good is our communication in regards to this project?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Low									High

- How well do we make decisions?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Low									High

Procedure for use:

1. Distribute the assessment prior to the meeting. Responses must be kept anonymous the first time the assessment is conducted. This will provide feelings of safety and comfort to people. Recognize that demanding openness will only make matters worse if you have issues of trust within your team (Levels 2 or 3). Be gentle during the first use of the assessment with your team, and be grateful for whatever conversation develops.

2. All responses should be completed and returned to you prior to the start of the meeting. Post each individual score during the meeting, not the average of the scores. Noting a specific cluster of scores on each scale will offer more insight than simply an average score. Additionally, people will be interested in seeing the range of responses that each question receives.

3. Without encouraging debating or expecting people to openly discuss their personal responses to each question, ask the team what stands out to them. Express your observations of the responses as well. Simply point out the obvious so that everyone notes the same results.

4. Inquire of the team what questions are raised in seeing these scores. Suppose that someone says, "I'm really interested in why half of us score item 3 very high while the rest score it very low." Ask if anyone would be willing to share and explain his or her response. Try a less vulnerable approach if no one volunteers, like, "Without divulging your personal rating, can anyone offer a thought as to why we are so split in this area?"

5. Ask the group what they think needs attention in order for the project to proceed effectively.

   Be sure to note the level of trust toward you and within the team for future reference. This will inform you whether you should conduct the assessment anonymously or publicly the next time it is used. (By publicly, I suggest using sticky dots. Everyone can then vote at the same time.)

IV.

BUILD STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

Take a look at the Stakeholder Analysis that you completed in the first part of this ebook. You will probably need alliances with all of those people – your boss, your team, your coworkers, and your colleagues across the country or in other organizations.

How do you build those relationships? You must first determine the current state of your business relationships. Consider this quick test: when you walk into a room, are these people likely to say that they are glad that you arrived or do negative whispers circulate about you? Of course, the former is preferred. Those types of relationships are the foundation for the strongest strategic alliances. Should the latter occur or people not recognize you, it's time to build up those relationships. Following are a few ideas for doing so.

1. **Build the Relationship Before You Need Something**

    Good salespeople know that relationships are far more important than the features and benefits of their products. When people trust you, they are more likely to trust your products. This concept is clarified in the following true story, also told in my book, *Why Don't You Want What I Want?*

    When Bryan McGraw was thrust into a new role as quality officer at a military base, he faced a lot of resistance. Predecessors to Bryan had established a contentious relationship with a chief master sergeant, the top enlisted man, who was against quality improvement. The sergeant resisted passively at first, but then began to push back with nasty memos and heated arguments. Due to his position and personal power, the sergeant was able to influence others to join his resistance to quality improvement. Bryan had a problem, because winning over this man was the key to his success.

    Someone advised, "He's a pothole. Drive around him." Others suggested that he simply ignore the sergeant. Going against those recommendations, Bryan recognized that the chief master sergeant was an influential and well-respected person, and made an effort to get to know the man who was such a critical player in his own victory. He uncovered shared interests, like a passion for hockey. Within six months, their relationship evolved into something positive, and the sergeant began to support the value that quality offers.

    Bryan noted that he started slipping messages into conversations with the sergeant, and asking questions. "I began by identifying things he was good at,

and then showed him how they linked to quality initiatives — picking where I could see potential battles won." Bryan made sure to point out examples of quality improvement and positive things that the sergeant did.

Perhaps the greatest compliment came when the sergeant was retiring from service. He told Bryan, "I wish others had made the attempt to make me understand quality the way you did." He went on to say that Bryan's predecessors tried to train him, but that they had never made an investment in him.

2. Find Ways to Prove Yourself

If the potential allies don't know you or don't like you, you've got to show them that you are worthy of their trust. The best way to do that is to work with them, so that they can see you in action.

Jeff (not his real name) operated a small installation controlled by the U.S. National Parks Service in the Washington, D.C. area. With only a staff of ten to twenty people depending on the season, Jeff's small outfit did not even come close to the number of employees working at our largest National Parks like Yosemite or Zion.

Since he worked in the same city as the national headquarters, Jeff found reasons to attend meetings at the main office. He volunteered to be on committees that proved successful, as he and his own small park performed well when he served on those committees. A small feat in itself to actually speak to anyone in the main offices, Jeff found it easier and easier to contact them for assistance. He learned new approaches, like, "Sue, we're really short on supplies and the Spring Festival is coming up. I was wondering if there is anything you might be able to do to get my request moving?" He was wildly successful at getting what he needed for his park.

By the way, Jeff's next appointment was a promotion to superintendent of the country's largest national parks.

Woody Allen once said, "Eighty percent of success is just showing up." Being in the right place at the right time does matter, but only if the people in the room know who you are. You've got earn a reputation so that when something comes up, people will say, "What about Pat?" That's the approach that worked for Jeff. You may need to be creative and find virtual ways of showing up, however, if the strategic partners are thousands of miles away. For that challenge to be met, you must be sure to supply the extra effort needed.

3. Learn What's Important to Them

Using the three levels ("I don't get it," "I don't like it," and "I don't like you"), ask yourself, "What does the world look like through their eyes?"

- At Level 1, do they know who you are and what you do? Do they know your department?

- At Level 2, do they view your requests as an asset or a liability to them? You might ask yourself:
    - What are their goals?
    - What are they afraid of?
    - What keeps them awake at night or gives them headaches?
    - What is their emotional reaction to your product, service, or project?

- Level 3 is the hardest one to tackle, but it is essential. For example, in some organizations Human Resources is seen as a liability. People complain about time wasted, lack of individual control, inconveniences incurred, and unimportance with each HR new product introduction.

    Conversely in other organizations, HR is seen as a strategic partner. It is all about how you look at the issues. Recognize that each department is an asset to the final product. Explore not only what can help line managers do their jobs better, but what insights HR people can offer.

    For instance, the COO of a large hospital told me, "I will simply not hold a senior meeting without the head of HR – she is that important. She looks at things in a way that's different from the rest of us, and holds us accountable on things that are critical to our success. She's a strategic asset."

    You might ask yourself:
    - What do they think of your organization, department, or team?
    - What do they think of you?
    - What do they like about you?
    - What concerns do they have about you?

    If you can't answer these questions, your ability to influence significantly decreases. I suggest that you find the answers. Listed below are two things you could do:

    - **Use Your Intuition and Experience.** Put yourself in their shoes, and then answer those questions. You may be surprised how much you already know.

- **Talk with someone who know you and knows them.** This conversation should be with someone who has nothing to lose by talking candidly with you. One of your employees may be a bad choice because you want someone who will tell you the truth. This person must be knowledgeable enough to talk about the group you want to influence and about that group in relation to you. This person will hopefully be able to reveal where your trouble spots exist.

4. Find Out What Others Are Saying About You

Knowing what people say when you are not in the room can be painful, but it can help to change your behavior in ways that will allow you to build support for your work utilizing different potential allies.

A couple of things that you can do to accomplish this are as follows:

- **Find someone who will speak the truth to you.** I sometimes refer to this as "coffee with Joe." (Joe/Jo can be either gender.) Joe/Jo is a type of person who speaks the truth without fear of reprisal. As unpleasant as this person may be, he or she will tell you things that others dare not say.

- **360° Feedback.** These types of tools can give you a solid glimpse as to what the Level 3 issues are. Remember that this level can work both for and against you. Look for signs of trust and distrust, effective and ineffective communication, reliability and inconsistency, etc.

The feedback from Joe/Jo or from 360° will give you a snapshot of where you are today. You may not like this snapshot, but it is the only one you have. Work with it.

5. Build Your Adaptive Skills

Years ago, the Center for Creative Leadership conducted research in what they termed adaptive skills. These are skills that were rarely addressed verbally or on performance reviews, but had a large impact on career potential for executives. Over time, many have borrowed the concept of adaptive skills.

Research on emotional intelligence at work confirms the importance of adaptive skills. These skills are especially important when you are trying to build and maintain strong working relationships.

Consider this partial list of skills to monitor:

- **Keep Commitments.**
  If you promise something – deliver on that promise.

  You must meet deadlines. If you say that you're going to have work ready at noon on Friday, submit your work by noon on Friday. Period. No excuses.

  Be aware that people tend to remember when your work is late, not that you did a nice job on the work. One time may not be a problem, but missing deadlines two or three times may develop a reputation that will be hard to break.

- **Be Straightforward.**
  Barry Goldwater was a patriarch of conservatives in America, and a very influential voice of the nation and the senate. In the 1980's, he wrote his autobiography. In it he expressed his opinion of who he thought had been the best U.S. President in the last 100 years. I fully expected that he would identify Ronald Reagan, as the two were cut from the same cloth.

  He didn't name Reagan, instead, he chose Harry S. Truman.

  Politically, Goldwater and Truman couldn't be more opposite. Goldwater was a conservative Republican, whereas Truman was a "New Deal" Democrat. Why would he choose Truman? According to Goldwater, he never went to bed at night wondering where Truman stood on any particular matter.

  Being able to trust the words that people say is a vitally important attribute. Many politicians don't seem to make this connection. When asked questions, they often sidestep or speak superficially about the issue. Unfortunately, that ability to spin and obfuscate is alive in organizations as well.

  When the people you are trying to influence feel that you are acting in the same manner, they begin to analyze what it was that you actually said. They no longer accept what you say at face-value alone.

There are more adaptive skills, and some of those skills are specific to each organization. The best way to find the skills that are apparent at your workplace is to simply be observant. Who are the people that others truly respect? What are they doing that other people aren't doing?

6. Building Change in Perceptions and Building Support is Possible - Really

In an article about a negotiator for Ford in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, the head of the union made reference to that negotiator at the end of the negotiations, saying, "She's wonderful. She really knows her stuff. She's a tough negotiator, and she listens and understands us." Others said that she took the time to get to know the people involved.

Having working in many union environments, I know that trust between management and labor is often poor. The negotiator for Ford had to overcome decades of Level 3 issues in order to prove that she knew how to listen. The key is – she did it.

Next Steps

✔ **Observe**

I am a big fan of observing before acting.

✔ **Practice**

Reading this ebook isn't enough. I wish that it were, but it's not. Tiger Woods didn't become a great golfer just by reading a book about golfing. He worked at it, and still does. Practice rounds and endless hours of working on his swing and strokes allowed him to improve his skill. He also learned as he competed. Most people who have achieved the level of mastery in a field have a similar story. We should learn from their examples.

✔ **Read More**

I put observing and practice before reading because it is too easy to think that the secret to success lies in simply reading another book or attending another training program. Of course reading to learn is important, but practice is key.

Here are some free resources on my werbiste:

The Challenges of Change White Paper

The Magic List (a short e-book that shows you how to determine the extent to which people might support or reesistt you.)

The Energy Bar   This is a tool that I use to help clients build stronger support for their ideas.

The All Hands Meeting White Paper Since so many big meetings are a waste of time, I conducted a study and learned some important things that can make big meetings more successful.

A Caveat

Sometimes, you can do all of the right things and nothing works. I've seen this happen over and over again.

A couple of possible reasons for this challenge.

1. It is possible that the person isn't actually doing all of the right things, or is doing them in a half-hearted fashion. Maybe they are simply going through the motions without commitment or a firm goal. If this description fits you, then you should seriously consider changing jobs. (The fact that you are reading this ebook makes me think that you don't fit in that category, for what it's worth.)

2. The organization merely may not support leadership from within the ranks. No matter how hard middle managers try, they will inevitably fail without support. I have seen good people figuratively beat their head against a wall in an attempt to implement improvements. Organizations must support their leaders, otherwise, the only outcome will be collapse. My suggestion is to leave if the company is uncooperative with those in management.

   During an Aikido class I was in, the instructor taught all of us a martial arts move. As we practiced with a black belt artist, people began asking how to counter moves. The patient instructor showed us how to adjust to changing circumstances. He also said that sometimes, you just need to "get out of Dodge." As managers, your great moves will not always work, and then is the time to leave the dangers of the Old West as well.

● **And Finally. . .**

   If you have questions about anything in this short ebook, please send me an e-mail. I will do my best to answer them.

   rick@rickmaurer.com

I wish you well.

- Rick Maurer

Resistance to Change
Why it Matters and What to Do About It
Rick Maurer

Nearly two-thirds of all major changes in organizations fail. That's pretty sobering information.

Did you know that:

- only about 30 percent of re-engineering projects succeed
- 23 percent of mergers recoup their costs
- 43 percent of quality improvement efforts are worth the effort
- 9 percent of major software applications are worth what you pay for them

(See my book, *Beyond the Wall of Resistance* for citations)

Fortune 500 executives say that resistance was the primary reason changes failed. Eighty percent of chief information officers say that resistance, not a lack of technical skills or resources, was the main reason why technology projects failed. It's that soft, touchy-feely, human reaction of resistance that matters the most.

But these statistics are only partly right. Resistance is *not* the primary reason why changes fail. ***The real problem is that leaders plan and instigate major changes in ways that create inertia, apathy, and opposition.***

For example, an executive announces that the company will be restructuring beginning the next week. Employees and middle managers start to resist. As the project unfolds, executives see resistance appear in many forms – malicious compliance, in-your-face arguments, and possibly sabotage. The executives respond by pushing the change even harder. They make demands, and employees increase their opposition. The change fails, goes well over the allotted budget, or deadlines completely disregarded.

Does this scenario sound at all familiar to you? If so, you're not alone. Consider the following:

- **You've Got to Know What Creates Resistance to Change**

  Resistance is in the eye of the beholder. The people resisting don't see what they are doing as resistance – they often see it as survival.

Resistance to change is a reaction to the way a change is being led. There are no born "resistors," waiting to ruin otherwise perfect plans. People resist in response to something.

Resistance protects people from harm. Suppose that I'm a novice downhill skier, for example. It's resistance that keeps me from taking the chair lift to the top of Bodycast Mountain. In an organization, resistance keeps me from saying "yes" to an assignment that I think will kill my career. After all, people aren't stupid.

The better we are at seeing what causes resistance, the easier it will be to build support for our ideas. In other words, if we understand resistance, we can also understand the support for change.

I have identified three levels of resistance.

- **Level 1 – I Don't Get It.**
  Level 1 involves information: facts, figures, and ideas. It is the world of thinking and rational action, presentations, diagrams, and logical arguments.

  Level 1 may come from . . .
  - Lack of information
  - Disagreement with data
  - Lack of exposure to critical information
  - Confusion over what it means

  Many make the mistake of treating all resistance as if it were Level 1. Well-meaning leaders give people more information. They hold more meetings and make more PowerPoint presentations when, in fact, something completely different is called for. That's where Levels 2 and 3 come in.

- **Level 2 – I Don't Like It.**
  Level 2 is an emotional reaction to the change. Blood pressure rises, adrenaline flows, pulse increases. It is based on fear. People are afraid that this change will cause them to lose face, status, control – maybe even their jobs.

  Level 2 is not wishy-washy. You can't tell people to "get over it" and expect them to respond with, "Wow, thanks, I needed that." Level 2 runs deep. When it kicks in, we can feel like our very survival is at stake.

  When Level 2 is active, it makes communicating change very difficult. When adrenaline shoots through our systems, we move into a fight-or-flight mode (or we may freeze, like a deer in the headlights). We stop listening. No matter how terrific your presentation is, once people hear "downsizing," their minds (and bodies) go elsewhere. This is uncontrollable. They are not choosing to ignore

you, it's just that they've got more important things on their minds – like their own survival.

Organizations usually don't encourage people to respond emotionally, so employees limit their questions and comments to Level 1 issues. They ask polite questions about budgets and timelines. Although it may appear that they are with you, they're not. They are asking Level 1 questions while hoping that you'll read between the lines and speak to their fears. The really tricky part is that they may not even be aware that they are operating on such a basic emotional level.

● **Level 3 – I Don't Like You.**
Maybe they like you, but they don't trust or have confidence in your leadership. That's a hard pill to swallow, I know. But lack of attention to Level 3 is a major reason why resistance flourishes and changes fail. It is seldom talked about. Books on change talk about strategies and plans, but most of this advice fails to recognize a major reason why change fails.

In Level 3 resistance, people are not resisting the idea. In fact, they may love the change you are presenting. They are resisting you. Maybe their history with you makes them wary. Perhaps they are afraid that this will be "a flavor of the month" like so many other changes, or that you won't have the courage to make the hard decisions that will see this change through.

It may not be you, rather, the people may resist those that you represent. The moment that people hear that someone from headquarters is present and wanting to help often leaves them skeptical. If you happen to be that person from headquarters, you're going to have a hard time getting those people to listen to you.

Whatever the reasons for this deeply entrenched resistance, you can't afford to ignore it.

People may understand the idea you are suggesting (Level 1), and they may even have a good feeling about the possibilities of this change (Level 2) – but they won't go along if they don't trust you.

- **How You Can Turn Resistance Into Support**

  Below are a few ideas to get you started addressing the various levels of resistance. Remember that all three levels could be in play simultaneously.

  - **Level 1 – Make Your Case**
    - Make sure that people know why a change is needed. Before you talk about *how* you want to do things, explain *why* something must be done.

    - Present the change using understandable language. If your audience isn't made up of financial specialists, detailed charts showing sophisticated analysis of the numbers will be lost on them.

    - Find multiple ways to make your case. People take in information in different ways – some like to hear the data and other prefer a visual sources like pictures or text. Some people learn best in interacting in a group or in conversation. The more variety in the communication channels, the greater the chance that people will comprehend what you have to say.

  - **Level 2 – Remove as Much of the Fear as You Can and Increase the Excitement about What's Positive About the Change**
    - Emphasize what's in it for them. People need to believe that the change will serve them in some way. For example, you could explain that work will be easier, relationships will improve, career opportunities will open up, or job security will increase.

    - Engage the people in the process. People tend to support things that they have a hand in building.

    - Be honest. If a change will hurt them – downsizing, for instance – tell them the truth. It's the right thing to do, and it stops the rumor mill from inventing stories about what might happen. Also, honesty bolsters their trust in you (a Level 3 issue).

  - **Level 3 - Rebuild Damaged Relationships and Tend to Neglected Relationships**
    - *Mea Culpa*. Take responsibility for things that may have led to the current tense relations.

    - Keep commitments. Demonstrate that you are trustworthy

- Find ways to spend time together so they get to know you and your team. This is especially helpful if the resistance comes from those whom you represent, and not just from your personal history together.

- Allow yourself to be influenced by the people who resist you. This doesn't mean that you give in to every demand, rather that you can admit that you may have been wrong and that they may have ideas worth considering.

The Israeli statesman Abba Eban once said, "Men and nations behave wisely, once they've exhausted all other alternatives." My hope is that this short white paper may help you behave wisely *before* you go through all those other alternatives. I wish you well.

Tips for Delegating the Leadership of Major Change
Rick Maurer

Early in the life of a major change, you will need to delegate portions of the initiative to various individuals, teams, and departments. The handoff from you to them is critically important. If you fumble or if they fail to pick up the ball, everything is put at risk.

Three things need to be in place in order for you to delegate effectively.

1. **They need to understand what this change is all about.** Why now? Why this change? In other words, let them know "why" and "what" before you get into "how to do it." The middle managers that will be leading portions of change need context in order to make good decisions. Without that understanding, they must make it up as they go along – guessing at why this is important and trying to intuit what's most important every step of the way. Don't leave this to chance – explain what's going on.

2. **They need to understand what's at stake.** What's driving this change – new competition, the need to respond quicker to challenges in your environment, fear that great performances today may not equal great performances in the coming years? What's the risk if you fail? What's the risk if you do nothing?

3. **They need to trust you (and other senior managers).** If they don't think you will see this through, they will probably do just enough work to keep you off their backs until you turn your attention to something else. You need to demonstrate that you are a capable leader. In other words, you will oversee this project from beginning to end. You will fight for resources. You will not be distracted by other new priorities.

Here are things that you – the middle manager – can do to create a clear agreement with the people who assign or delegate work to you.

Create a Contract

A very good way to hand off the assignment is to develop a simple contract with the leaders who will be assigned to plan and carry out various parts of the change. This contract should include:

● **Common understanding of outcome**

Make sure that you and the people or groups you delegate to have a common understanding of what is expected. Explain your picture of success. What will it look like? How will you know when you are successful? Robert Mager, who wrote extensively about creating good goals and objectives, said that a clear goal was one that "if you met it on the street, you'd recognize it."

● **Specific milestones and completion date**

Explain how all of you will be able to measure success along the way. What are the metrics you will use? If you don't have a good answer for this question, then turn to the people you are delegating to and develop clear measurable milestones in collaboration with them.

Let your people know how much detail you will need as they go along. Some leaders want to be in the loop every step of the way, while others prefer minimal up-dates. Make sure these leaders know what you want.

● **Resources**

Ask what they will need in order to meet these targets? For example:

  ● **People.** Who do they need in order to be successful? Perhaps they will need access to an engineer in another location or a marketing whiz from across the country.
  ● **Money.** What's the budget for their portion of the project?
  ● **Access to other stakeholders.** Ask who else they will need to talk to in order to be successful. Often these will be your peers, and you can be the link that opens those doors.

- **Access to you.** Discuss the best ways for you to stay in touch. Tell them the best way to contact you when they have an urgent question.
- **Protect their time.** These people are probably already overworked. You can't simply add another major project and expect it will get done. You've got to be willing to re-adjust priorities. If you don't, you risk seeing projects either die or come in well beneath expectations.

- **Anticipate Glitches**

  With the help of the people to whom you are delegating, brainstorm things that could go wrong. (Don't pretend that this time will be different than all the others. Plan for the unexpected.)

  Identify those glitches that are important to address today. Discuss what you can do to protect against that glitch occurring in the first place? What are the early warning signs that something might be about to occur? What contingency plans will you put into place to avert a major problem?

- **Review**

  Make sure that everyone is clear about all parts of this contract. Thank people for coming -- and then get started. This simple process gets major changes off on the right foot and can save you many headaches, broken reputations, and potential failures. Good luck.

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This is part of my Batteries Not Included™ approach.
For more information about my approach to leading change (and access to many free resources), visit www.rickmaurer.com or contact us directly at 703-525-7074 or rick@rickmaurer.com.

About Rick Maurer

Rick Maurer is an advisor to leaders in large organizations on ways to plan and implement change successfully.

Many organizations and consulting firms have applied Rick's unique approach to leading change including Lockheed Martin, Bell Atlantic (Verizon), Rohm & Haas (Dow Chemical), The Urban Library Council, Tulane University Medical Center, Deloitte Consulting, Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, The Washington Post, American Management Systems, AARP, FAA, Mount Sinai NYU Medical Center, Charles Schwab, Sandia National Labs, National GeoSpatial Intelligence Agency (NGA), the District of Columbia Public Schools, the International Monetary Fund, and many other corporations, non-profits, and government agencies.

Since publication of the first edition of *Beyond the Wall of Resistance* in 1996, his opinion has been sought by *The Wall Street Journal, Fortune,* NBC Nightly News, CNBC*, The Washington Post, The New York Times, the Economist USA Today, The Globe and Mail, Industry Week, Fast Company*, and *Investors' Business Daily*.

In addition to speaking and advisory service to leaders and planning teams, , Rick teaches at The Gestalt Institute of Cleveland.

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