

A photograph of a winter forest. A paved path winds through a dense stand of tall, thin trees. The ground is covered in a layer of snow, and the branches of the trees are bare and dusted with snow. The sky is a pale, overcast blue. The overall mood is quiet and serene.

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heart and soul

■ by Justin McRoberts

Pushback and Resistance in Leadership

Sometimes, pushback isn't just *pushback*. Sometimes resistance isn't just resistance. I would suggest it never has to be. Like nearly all other social and institutional interaction elements, pushback and resistance are what you make of them.

When you invite a response from someone and what you receive is negative, calling that negativity *pushback* misses the moment and truncates a process that can deeply enrich your leadership and relationships. What if you saw those moments as invitations and opportunities to know more deeply the people you work with, serve and love? What if those were refining moments for you rather than only dead ends?

Here are three ways to shift your thinking about resistance and pushback:

- 1. It might be natural.** Pushback is sometimes the primary way someone has learned to engage with others. For some folks, leading with resistance is as natural to them as breathing and has nothing specifically to do with you or your invitation, idea or plan. Remember here that disagreement and arguments are forms of relationship rather than obstacles to relationship. Similarly, resistance and feedback might be the front door through which that person walks into any interaction.
- 2. It may be a test.** Resistance or pushback can be a way someone checks to see if you are safe to partner with or be around. Sometimes that posture is unconscious, and sometimes it's very intentional. The truth is that we live and work in a world filled with lots of unsafe people in treacherous environments. Sometimes, pushback or resistance at the front of a project or partnership means you're being tested.
- 3. It could be a response.** Resistance and pushback can sometimes be a response to the way you communicate or execute your leadership. That might be particularly true if you regularly find yourself on the other side of resistance or pushback. It is tempting to receive any pushback or resistance as criticism of your idea or plan, but if you think you've got a good idea or a solid plan, you probably do! So, what if the resistance and pushback you are getting have more to do with how you talk about your plans? How might you need to adjust your invitation? If you've got an idea worth inviting people into, it's also worth learning to "pitch."

All our plans, dreams and schemes are opportunities to share work and life with other people. So let's make moments of pushback and resistance into refining and clarifying moments so that we can more lovingly and effectively do that. ■



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