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"Quotes"

"You have to be very strong to work with [him]. He's like a pendulum, swinging back and forth, smashing things as he goes. Neither of us were afraid of confrontation, but we were always able to do it without insulting or disappointing each other. If you push back at [him], he'll say, 'OK, show me.' And if you're right, he'll be the first to acknowledge it."

~Andrew Adamson

"Many a man's strength is in opposition, and when he faileth, he groweth out of use"

~Francis Bacon

"It is nice to be around people who think differently than you. They challenge your ideas and keep you from being complacent."

~Tucker Carlson

"Everyone has a responsibility to not only tolerate another person's point of view, but also to accept it eagerly as a challenge to your own understanding. And express those

Why Can't We All Just Get Along?

I actually had another topic in mind for this month's edition of *EA Insights*.

Then came the call from a client wanting to bounce ideas around after a team leader resigned because of dissent on the ranks. It was followed closely by a request for advice from another front on handling tension with a major client. And, when I had lunch with a friend who lamented over a supervisor that seemed to block every move, I started to get the hint that my original idea was to be shelved.

So, tell me. In the immortal words of Rodney King, "Why can't we all just get along?"

The answer, in short, is because we're human. As humans, we're different; we're opinionated; we're passionate; we're hurting; we're prideful; we're ornery; and sometimes, we're downright mean. But, the bottom line is that we're lumped into families; into neighborhoods; into churches, clubs, and committees; and into businesses, and we're expected to get something done...together (and, I hope, sanely). The fundamental question is, "How?"

With that thought in mind, this month, let's talk about how to cope with pushback. We all face it at one time or another. So, why not be ready?

All the best,

June

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Getting Ahead in Spite of Pushback

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In the Bible, peacemakers are called "blessed." And, if you enjoy living a peaceful life, that's really an encouraging thought.

Well, my peace-loving friend, there you are, going your merry way. You're running your business. You're leading your staff. You're producing good work in your cubicle. You're doing what you do. When, smack! You suddenly run into a brick wall -- a wall of opposition, tension, undermining ... pushback.

Now, you didn't go looking for the wall. In fact, if you'd seen it, you surely would have avoided it.

But, now that you have met it (face first, by the way), you'd like to get around it and keep moving. However, until you do, it's distracting, and discouraging, and demanding.

Honestly, the question isn't what you'll do **if** you experience opposition. The real question is what you'll do **when** it comes your way. So, let's look at three examples from nature that illustrate ways people tend to deal with pushback.

Option 1: The Ostrich Approach

Although I don't recommend this option, it's important to acknowledge its existence.

You're minding your own business, and the challenge comes. In this scenario, the ostrich sticks his head in the sand, hoping against hope that, by ignoring the matter, it will just go away.

Wrong!

Walls of opposition don't disappear by ignoring them. In fact, they often get higher, wider, and more fortified. In other words, pushback that goes

unaddressed becomes bolder, more widespread, and more disruptive to achieving intended outcomes. So, no matter how disturbing it can be today to confront opposition, in the long run, the alternative may be far more damaging.

Option 2: The Boar Approach

Okay, picture this one. The boar is moving along nicely at work. Suddenly, there's tension or opposition (translation: danger), and just like its namesake, the instinct is to charge -- head up, mouth wide, and biting! Ouch! Bottom line: Disrupting the boar's peace results in attack first, questions later.

Now, what does being a boar accomplish? Well, yes, it will quell some opposition because boars can overpower those who are weaker than they are. On the other hand, if pushback arises from one who's a good match, one who's stronger or better positioned, or one who just gets jazzed by a good fight, watch out!

Interestingly, although strong and able to hold their own, boars tend to overlook a lot. For instance, those who favor the boar approach often miss the fact that not all apparent opposition is intended to be an attack (even though it may seem that way). Opposition may be a reaction caused by misunderstanding, fear, or hurt. Additionally, boars may not stop to consider that, if they plow everyone down who seems to get in the way, what happens to the carnage that's left? What's the likelihood thereafter of good working relationships with, or productivity by, the wounded or the traumatized bystanders? Hmmm.

Option 3: The Squirrel Approach

Have you ever watched squirrels? They offer some interesting characteristics that can be quite useful in facing pushback. Think about it; squirrels are:

Aware -- Squirrels, at least in their natural habitat, have a heightened sense of awareness. (Note the disclaimer here. It appears that our little friends have not quite mastered the art of navigating in environments with cars!) However, in nature, they seem to know what's around them and where there's the potential for danger.

So, how does awareness relate to pushback? Even before the pushback comes, it's important to be watchful. In one respect, that means not being so absorbed in self -- *your work, your agenda, your outcomes* -- that you fail to recognize that you share space with others who have goals as well. Also, awareness means being a constant student of your environment, seeking to discern the patterns, behaviors, and motives of those around you so that you're better able to sense trouble and to distinguish between pushback with cautious intent versus that with malicious intent.



Disarming -- Okay, when's the last time you really felt threatened by a squirrel? That's my point. Although scrappy at times, squirrels aren't predatory. They tend to put others at ease.

Sometimes the best way to approach pushback is with that same disarming nature. Let's say that you sense resistance to a plan or suggestion. It's possible to bristle and adopt a "my way or the highway" stance. However, ever think about stopping right there and, instead of becoming defensive, asking if what you're feeling is real? Now, people won't always immediately admit their opposition. But, ever try taking it the next step and encouraging a candid exchange about the approach you're suggesting, how it could improve the situation, and how it could be reworked to function even better? That's one way to neutralize potential opposition in a productive, rather than boorish, manner.

Industrious -- Squirrels just don't stop! They're constantly searching, and scurrying, and even willing to stop a game of tag with a friend in order to grab and then pick away at an interesting treat that suddenly becomes available.

It's that sense of not letting things rest that's important here for coping with pushback. A person who effectively deals with opposition won't just ignore a situation or just plow ahead because he's in charge or happens to be the most forceful. Instead, he'll step back; assess the environment; openly acknowledge a problem he is sensing; and then solicit input from those involved about their feelings, positions, and ideas for improvement. This person views opposition as an opportunity. He recognizes that, sometimes uncomfortable, pushback can be invaluable for strengthening one's the approach and for uncovering, and addressing, potential obstacles that could derail the plan.

The industrious person realizes that, to the extent that a particular move isn't required by safety, legal, or ethical considerations, there's room for discussion. And, there's opportunity to work together to reach an outcome in which everyone feels heard and validated, and which bolsters the likelihood of getting ahead and coexisting in peace.

challenges in terms of serving other people."

~Arlo Guthrie

"Greatness is not measured by what a man or woman accomplishes, but by the opposition he or she has overcome to reach his goals."

~Dorothy Height

"People are not perfect... very often the relationships that are strongest are those where people have worked through big crises, but they've had to work through them."

~Patricia Hewitt

"The opposition is indispensable. A good statesman, like any other sensible human being, always learns more from his opposition than from his fervent supporters."

~Walter Lippmann

"The better the opposition that's put in front of you, the better your team plays,"

~Michael Owen

"The opposition was heard from. I think it's important that both sides be heard."

~Richard Tolbert

"Adversity is a fact of life. It can't be controlled. What we can control is how we react to it."

~Unknown

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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