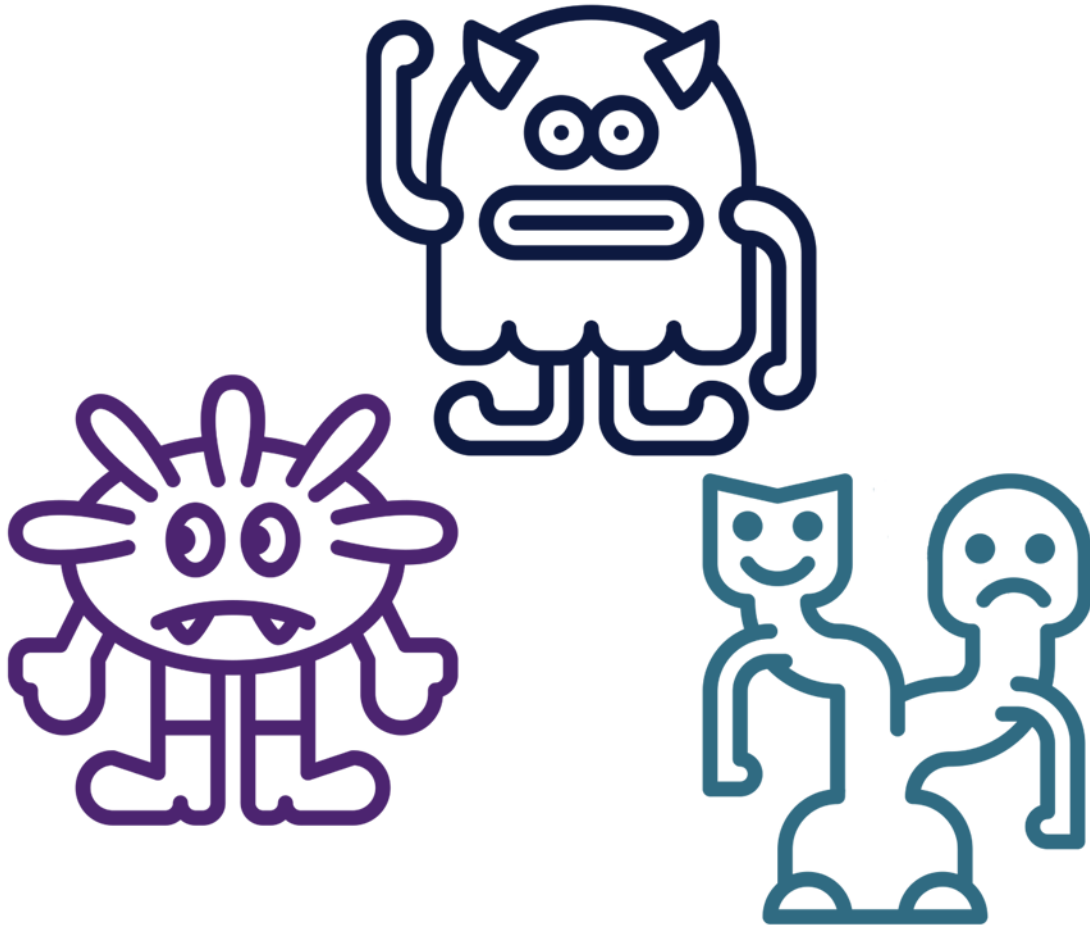


Grace Judson



Taming the Resistance Monster

*a leadership resource
from Grace Judson*

~ musings on the intersection of life, leadership, and individuality ~



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TAMING THE RESISTANCE MONSTER

INTRODUCTION: THE THREE FLAVORS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

logical/helpful



emotional/anxious



blended



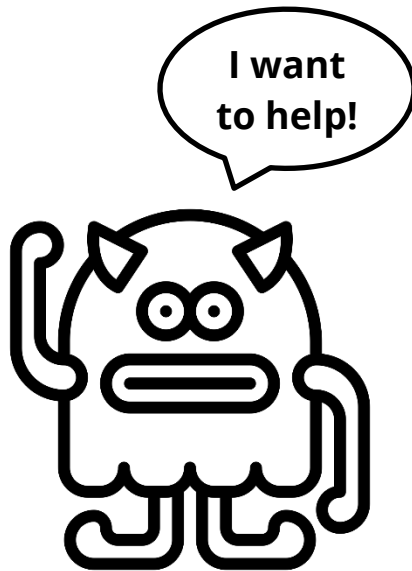
There are three basic types of resistance to change:

- logical
- emotional
- blended

I also call them:

- helpful
- anxious
- and, well, yes, blended!

???



When you know which one you're dealing with, you have a far better chance of helping your team move through the resistance so they can participate actively in what needs to happen.

But the challenge, of course, is ... **how** ... right?

That's what this guide will help you do: figure out which Resistance Monster each of your team members is wrangling, and then help them tame it.

Let's start by defining the monsters.

Logical / Helpful

This Resistance Monster sincerely wants to help. They're saying:

"I have factual reasons and risk factors that I think should be addressed. I have ideas about how to address them that would make the change more likely to succeed and might lead to better outcomes."

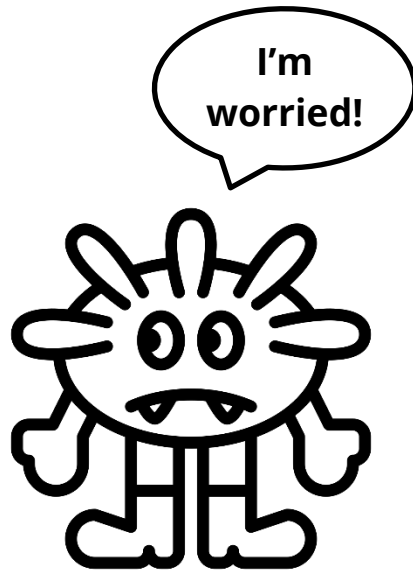
This is the best kind of Resistance Monster you can have. They're worth their weight in whatever substance you prefer – gold, chocolate, bitcoin (does bitcoin even have a weight?). When you listen, ask questions, accept their input, and then *act on it*, you'll

have a better chance of success and a significant likelihood of better outcomes.

Emotional / Anxious

Here we have someone who's deeply concerned about what this change might mean for them personally.

"This change scares me and makes me anxious because I don't know what might happen to me and to my job."



Emotional resistance can happen in any type of change, though I see it most often in technology initiatives (looking at you, AI!) and company mergers. And it's reasonable enough, after all, as there are almost always looming questions about job security, corporate identity, and *can I learn and do what I need to learn and do in order to keep my job?* On top of that, it's close to impossible to avoid rumors and nervous whispers between employees, which only amps up the anxiety.

These fears are *real*, based on past experience and on hearing other people's stories. Don't dismiss them, but instead explore ways to help them feel more confident about outcomes (as I'll explain in the "what to do" section below).

Blended (helpful + anxious)

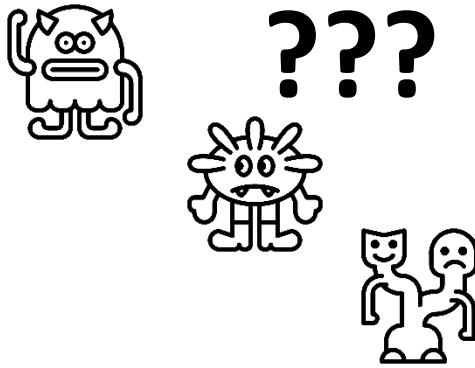


This is an interesting situation: someone who sees potential risks *and* fears possible personal outcomes.

*"This change scares me because of these factual reasons and risk factors that feel threatening to me **and** might affect the outcome of the change. I have ideas about how to address them that would make me feel better and might also make the change more successful."*

It's tempting to respond to this person solely from the perspective of their factual reasons and ideas – but bear in mind that those reasons might apply only, or mostly, to them, and may not even be directly related to the larger desired impact of the change.

Of course, when one person on the team has personal concerns, it's almost certain that others do too – and that they're whispering between themselves.



How do I understand which monsters are on my team?

This, of course, is the essential question change leaders need to ask.

But first, let's take a quick look at what *not* to do.

DO NOT “STEAMROLL” OVER RESISTANCE

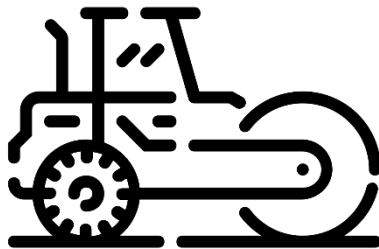
I'm saddened, though not shocked, by the stories I hear of people being “steamrolled” through resistance.

“The train is leaving the station – you're either on it, or you're off.”

“Plenty of people would love to have your job.”

These are actual statements leaders have said to their teams, as told to me by the people who heard them.

Threats are never a good response to resistance, no matter how frustrated you may feel or how irrational you think they are.



don't do it!

Now let's look at how to identify each monster



step one

Each of your people is an individual, with their own way of expressing themselves and their own unique communication preferences.

Whether you're dealing with change and resistance, or leading your team through day-to-day work, understanding your people is an essential part of leadership.



step two

There's one simple question that will tell you which Resistance Monster you're facing.

This question works even when someone is emotionally reactive (whether visibly or privately), because it doesn't ask them to "calm down" or imply that they're being irrational (as we are so often tempted to do, especially in the workplace).

I'll spare you the neuroscience behind this (feel free to [email me](#) if you'd like to know). Just know that it works. And try it out on your

kids, partner, colleagues, friends – practice is important, and will prove its effectiveness.

Here's the question:

What's the worst thing about this for you?

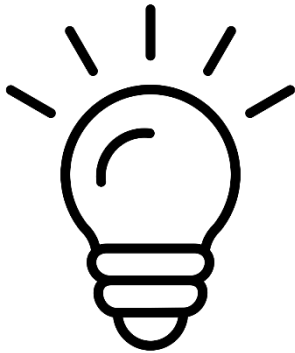
That's it.

The information you'll gain from their answer is pure insight.

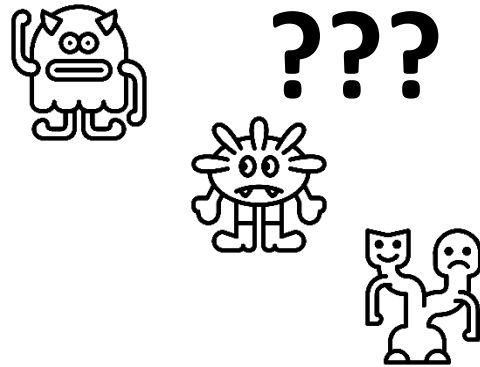
If, that is, you ask it sincerely, truly wanting to know, and not just because “this person on the internet said to ask” (meaning, me!). Because, trust me: they'll know if you're not open to whatever they have to say.

Also: this is not a question to ask in a group setting. Talk to your people *individually* and *privately*. Even in the best of company cultures, people don't always feel comfortable speaking in a group about the things that concern them – especially if you have an Anxious or Blended person on the team.

That said, let's look at some examples, according to how each type might respond.



So, which monster am I talking to?



Many people will hesitate before answering that “what’s the worst thing” question, so you may need to ask it more than once.

Or try asking it in slightly different ways, such as:

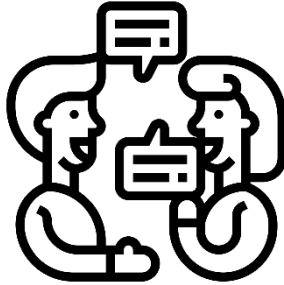
What bothers you the most about this change?

What’s an idea you have that would make this change better?

Yes, that second question is very different from the others. Only ask it if you’re not getting useful answers from the first two.

Here are some answers you might hear

- (a) “I think something’s missing– have you thought about *this*?”
- (b) “I heard someone say something about possible layoffs??”
- (c) “I dunno ... I hope there’s going to be some sort of training and support?”
- (d) “I guess I’m not sure what the final goal is supposed to be?”
- (e) “Why are we doing this, again?”



Can you tell which of these go with which Resistance Monster?

When you're ready to find out, click here: [Answer Key](#): which monster? to jump to the answer key – and then click “return” to come back here.

You'll note from the answer key that just one question won't always give you the full answer.

You need to have *conversations*. These questions are *conversation starters*.

Take your time. Be open-minded and compassionate. The responses you'll get in these conversations are key to taming the Resistance Monsters on your team and helping everyone engage willingly and participate in the change.

Now what?

Great. You know who you're dealing with – and there will probably be a mix of types on your team.

Now you take what you've learned and *do something*.

The Logical / Helpful monster has described problems and risk factors.

The Emotional / Anxious monster has explained their personal concerns.

The Blended monster has described problems and risk factors that may only apply to them – but might also apply to the change initiative as a whole, and even if only personal, they almost certainly are shared by others on the team.

Problems and risk factors

Helpful, Anxious, and Blended: all three types will see issues with the change initiative as a whole – and yes, even the purely Anxious person, because their concerns will almost certainly be shared by others, and can be addressed.

Fix them.

Come up with a plan to mitigate the risks and solve the problems.

Even if you think they're unlikely – you will make the change *better* if you resolve these issues.

Personal concerns

Anxious and Blended types will tell you about concerns they have about the impact of the change on them personally.

Address them *with the group*. As I've said, if one person has a personal concern, there will be others in the group who also have that concern, but haven't told you about it.

Possible responses you can offer:

"I can't say whether or not there will be layoffs. I promise I'll let you know as soon as there's a definite answer, and I also promise I'll fight for fair severance pay and support in finding another job if layoffs *do* happen."

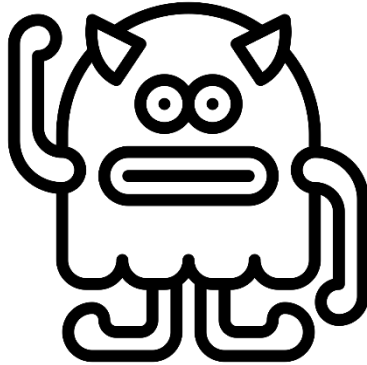
OR

"I can assure you that there are no layoffs planned as part of this change initiative." (Obviously, you'll only say this if in fact you are *quite* sure there will be no change-related layoffs!)

"We are in the process of planning a training schedule. At the moment, it looks like it will be early next month, and it will probably be a two-day program. I'll keep you updated as soon as we have more details."

And so on.

Bear in mind that *even if* you think these questions have been answered, your people may not have heard the answer, or may need to hear it again to feel confident.



A CASE STUDY ABOUT HELPFUL MONSTERS

Once upon a time, I was asked to implement a cross-functional knowledge-sharing initiative at a software company.

Everyone agreed in the meeting when the CEO and VP of Sales explained the need. It wasn't surprising to hear them say that the developers, tech support people, and consulting team all needed to communicate better about the system's capabilities and how customers were using the tool.

Outside the meeting, however, there was a lot of resistance.

I could have steamrolled. After all, this was a mandate from the CEO!

Instead, I went to each division's leader – development, tech support, consulting – and asked what their concerns were.

I didn't agree with all of them, *but that didn't matter*. If I wanted this project to succeed, I needed to respond, not tell them how wrong they were.

I went back to my office and thought about what they'd told me, and then wrote up plans to address each and every concern, including checkpoints where we'd validate whether any of the problems they foresaw were actually happening.

I then went back to each of them and presented my ideas. They agreed. And with their agreement, the project went forward.

Years later, I would occasionally run into one or another of the employees I'd worked with on the project. Each time, I was told – in so many words – “That was the best thing that ever happened there!”

Those department leaders were Helpful Monsters. They weren't always nice about it – and that's one important point to remember. And they were skeptical, even after I presented my plans for addressing their concerns – another important point to remember.

And the Helpful Monster can end up, as mine did, making your change *better* than it would have been without their input.



IN CLOSING...

As the leader of a change initiative, you'll find each of these Resistance Monsters have their own special (!) challenges to deal with. And as someone who has both responsibility and authority for creating change, you'll sometimes need to grab onto your patience with both hands and hold tight, staying firm in your determination *not* to steamroll anyone.

It's worth the effort. You'll build trust for the long term – beyond the immediate change project – and you'll develop leadership skills that will serve you wherever you go and whatever you do, in your career and in your life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: GRACE JUDSON

SO, WHY SHOULD YOU PAY ATTENTION TO ME?

I could give you the usual sort of backstory about how I spent twentysomething years working in tech and finance companies, sixteen of them in leadership. I experienced it all – technology change, culture change, corporate mergers, and more.

All true. But, well, yawn.

Because there are a gazillion consultants out there who say pretty much the same thing. Not very inspiring, eh?

SO – WHY ME, AND WHY LEADERSHIP?

I believe that true, humane leadership at all levels – understanding the individuality of leadership and the ways we're all leaders whether we have the title or not – is a real and significant competitive advantage.

I believe that humane leadership is key to healthy organizations with strong, supportive cultures.

I believe that humane leadership is the antidote to change fatigue and burnout.

I believe that leadership skills are *life* skills, not merely career skills.

Companies typically excel at strategic planning, task management, and resource allocation. But it takes a different skillset to address the people issues that arise.



That's where I can help.

And I do it with a sense of humor. Because if you can't have fun, if you can't be a little silly sometimes, what's the point? Leadership is serious stuff, *and* a little playfulness goes a long way to build trust, enhance learning, and just make everything more pleasant.

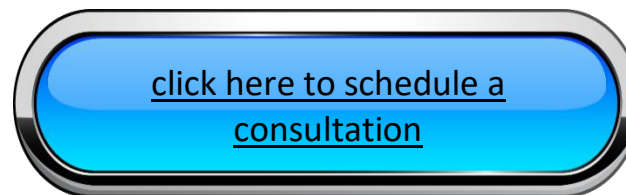
Want to learn more? [Click here](#) and we'll talk. Or [click here](#) to read about training options, or [here](#) to read about consulting services.

I WORK WITH SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED COMPANIES...

... whose leaders want to *do better*. And I work with individuals who want to learn the skills of humane leadership.

WANT MORE?

Let's talk. Click the big blue button to schedule time for a consultation to see how I can help you succeed at change.



Or follow me on LinkedIn and Substack.



ANSWER KEY: WHICH MONSTER?

(a) "I think something's missing – have you thought about *this*?"

Helpful

(b) "I heard someone say something about possible layoffs?"

Anxious

(c) "I dunno ... I hope there's going to be some sort of training and support?"

Probably blended

(d) "I guess I'm not sure what the final goal is supposed to be?"

Probably blended

(e) "Why are we doing this, again?"

Possibly helpful, possibly blended

[Click to return](#) to the text.