

# GETTING BETTER AT OVERCOMING RESISTANCE



By Roger Martin

When we've been discussing how to remove the roadblocks to change, we've concluded it's important to challenge and change whatever stands in the way, including the deep-seated assumptions that can prevent us from being our best selves. Roger Martin reflects on this here.

I'm inspired by the Better Way principles and behaviours. They speak to what I think we collectively need at this time.

And they cause resistance. In myself primarily.

Let me share how I became aware of this and what has helped me overcome it, with reference to two of the Better Way behaviours.

**Sharing And Building Power, because power is held in too few hands, and we all have more power than we think to change things for the better**

Ever since the age of seven, when a teacher hit both my open palms with a wooden ruler as punishment for a misdemeanour I didn't commit, I've had trouble trusting those with power.

Over time, beliefs connected to this event gathered momentum. They had headlines like 'Power corrupts,' and 'Be wary of authority'. Looking back, many of my subsequent interactions with others, provided yet more evidence they were true.

At the time though I was unaware of these beliefs. They lay hidden in my sub-conscious. All I felt was resistance whenever I had to ask those with power for resources or a favour. I showed up feeling suspicious. My 'what's right-and-fair' radar was in overdrive. Had I been conscious of the notion of *sharing* and *building* power, it would have seemed alien.

Recently all this changed. When a mentor helped me join the dots between my unjust punishment, the belief system it catalysed and the resistance I felt in the company of those with power, it led to several realisations.

I saw for the first time how beliefs form and get confirmed as truths via subsequent experiences. In the vocabulary of psychology, what I was ‘projecting’ on to others became clear.

Clarity helped me entertain the idea that some leaders experienced power as a privilege to be used wisely, not a corrupting ego boost. I became tearful whenever watching Nelson Mandela for instance. To me his actions showed how he understood ‘the we’ not just ‘us and them’. Less attached to my truth about how power corrupts in every case, I saw how many have similar traits. They’re everywhere. I just hadn’t seen them.

Gradually, the grip of resistance lessened. I spoke from a place of curiosity inside, not fear and suspicion. I stopped assuming I knew what power does to colleagues. And to my surprise, they not only started *sharing* it with me, but I was able to *build* on it too. By holding lightly what I’d always believed to be true, I rediscovered some assemblance of my own power.

If I’m frank, I feel cautious about sharing personal realisations like these. They can look obvious and trite to some. Self-indulgent even. But I do so knowing clarity eludes us when we’re caught up in beliefs we’re unaware of and only have resistance-like feelings to go on.

Nowadays I try to read such feelings as a signal I’ve not yet joined all the relevant dots.

### **Listening To Each Other, particularly those least heard, because that is the only way to find out what’s not working and discover what will**

How often do you feel really heard and your humanity affirmed as a result? In my experience this is a rare occurrence for many.

Why might this be?

I used to consider myself a good listener. I’d justify this claim by pointing to how comprehensive my notes were. This, alas, turned out to be erroneous.

As am I, we’re all prone to listen to reply, or to negate, or to confirm, based on the mental or written notes we’ve made. This is quite different to listening to understand.

In my case for example, when someone was speaking, in effect I listened to my thinking and interpretation of what they were saying, not what was actually being expressed. Only when I stopped taking copious notes did I fully appreciate the difference it made.

Another distinction I found helpful, especially when disagreements were in the air, was not to conflate listening to someone with agreeing with them. Seeing these as two separate processes freed me to focus on the former and resist the temptation to agree or disagree until I fully understood another’s position.

Inevitably, when listening, thoughts flood the mind. They can either entertain us – by drawing our attention away from what the person we’re conversing with wants to express – or we can entertain them.

In the latter case, a thought experiment that helped me – which I invite you to try out yourself – is to simply notice when your mind does the following, and instead of letting your attention and curiosity play along, bring them back to *what* the person before you is saying and *how*.

- Drifts.
- Interprets and immediately compares and contrasts.
- Wants to interrupt with questions (so deprives the speaker of time to collect their thoughts.)
- Agrees and confirms what it likes to hear.
- Disagrees with what causes discombobulation.
- Worries about how you'll respond when your turn comes.

When I notice thought-related distractions like these, and don't play along, it's easier for me, and the person in front of me, to uncover *what's not working*. In most cases, when I've been fully present, heard what they have to say, and play that back, our desire to explore *what will work* grows.

Imagine if this seemed true to most of us: when removing roadblocks and overcoming resistance to the Better Way, we each have more influence than might first appear.

**Roger Martin is a Co-Founder of The Mindset Difference – a niche consultancy focused on helping leaders and teams be at their best, irrespective of the circumstances they face. Having witnessed the limitations in conventional methods of developing leaders and teams, the business was set up to offer a new approach. Put simply one that helps people subtract or take less seriously thinking habits that inhibit access to innate human qualities such as openness, creativity, resilience, compassion, collaboration, innovation, resourcefulness, courage and root cause problem solving. The very same qualities that bring out the best in teams, those they serve and create a one-team, can-do culture.**