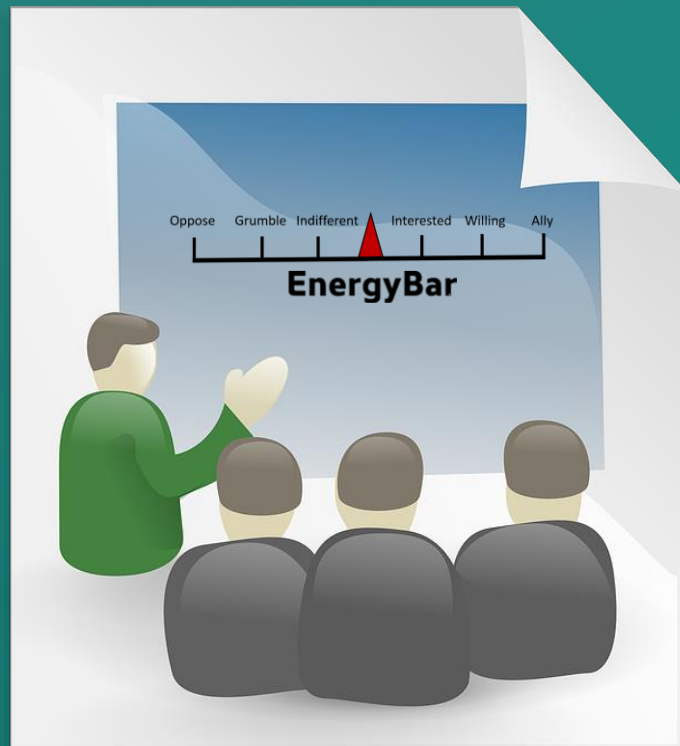


## WHY CAN'T THEY SEE THIS PROJECT IS REALLY IMPORTANT?

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Simple ways to turn backbiting, silo-mentality, and foot dragging into strong support.



## Why Can't They See This Project Is Really Important?

Sometimes we desperately need someone else to support our great idea, our new project, or some other change in the organization, but all we get is backbiting, silo mentality, foot-dragging, confusion, and so on.

And, if this continues, our project could fail.

If this describes a situation you are facing, then I encourage you to use this short e-book to see if you can shift energy from resistance or reluctance to engagement and support.



## To begin, you'll need to answer four big questions.

1

Are you willing to be influenced by the people you want to influence?

2

How much are you willing to be influenced?

3

What's the gap between the energy you need and the energy you are likely to get?

4

Why is their energy where it is today?

# ① Are you willing to be influenced by the people you want to influence?

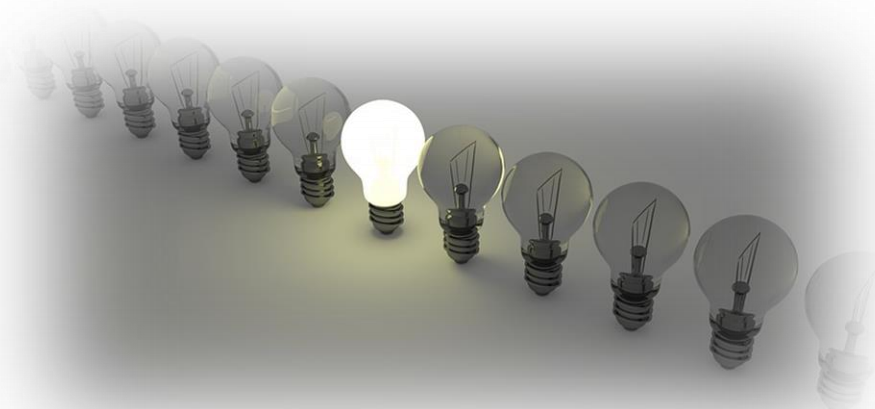
I know that you want to influence *them*, but allowing yourself to be influenced in return can be an extremely effective way of building support for new programs, projects, or any change in how things are done at work.

[A note: I will use third-person “them” in this paper. I know that some readers will be focusing on an individual, and others will focus on a group. Makes no difference. This approach can help in either situation.]

Just being willing to be influenced does not need to put your idea at risk. But it does mean that you are willing to consider that there might be some things you haven’t seen or thought about.

If you answered yes, move on to Question 2.

If you answered no, then please read the following before you hit delete.



# If you are unwilling to be influenced by them, you still have options.

## **YOU COULD GIVE UP.**

You might assess the situation and realize that you have little chance of succeeding. As the eminent philosopher Kenny Rogers suggested in “The Gambler”, “You’ve got to know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em, know when to walk away...” Sometimes the timing isn’t right. Sometimes you are not in a position to make something happen. That’s life, and like a wise poker player, it’s good to know when to fold ‘em and when to walk away.

## **YOU COULD TRY TO FORCE THEM TO SUPPORT YOU.**

There is no shortage of people using power in this way. They tend to treat situations like battles or games, which only one side can win. While that strategy can work, you run the risk of alienating potential allies and destroying engagement and loyalty.

## **YOU CAN TRY TO TRICK THEM INTO SUPPORTING YOU.**

Just like force, manipulation is a popular influence strategy in organizations. But once people realize that they are working with a con artist, they look at everything that leader does with suspicion. (“I wonder what she means by that?” “What’s he up to this time?”)

## **YOU COULD CLICK YOUR HEELS THREE TIMES AND HOPE FOR THE BEST.**

This is on par with believing that if you build it they will come. I don’t recommend wishful thinking as a reliable strategy.

## 2

# How much are you willing to be influenced?

Before you talk with other people, consider your limits.

How much will you allow yourself to be influenced by them, and in what areas?

Some people's input might be more welcome than others. For example, in my work with clients, I work with some people who get an automatic "yes" from me on pretty much every item in the list below. But in the past, I've had my share of situations where my willingness to be influenced was pretty limited.

Knowing your limits can help you avoid embarrassing situations. I saw a leader invite people to critique what was going on in the organization. When the criticism turned to the leader himself, he lashed out. Obviously, his reaction made matters worse.

Here is a list of possibilities. You might say yes to one of these items or to all of them. Note that your answer will change depending on who you choose to focus on.

❖ **YOU ARE WILLING TO INVITE THEM TO HELP YOU MAKE SENSE OF INFORMATION THAT IS CRITICAL TO THE BUSINESS.**

A CEO of a hospital told me that he gave everyone a one-page quarterly report that showed how the hospital was doing in a few critical areas. He did this to help everyone make sense of trends, shifts in customer satisfaction, financial performance, and so forth.

❖ **YOU ARE WILLING TO INVITE THEM TO PLAN WITH YOU.**

Making sense of the data and *determining a plan of action* are two separate activities. It is one thing to realize that you've got a customer service problem; it is another thing to determine how you will address this challenge—and that's the planning activity.

❖ **YOU ARE WILLING TO HAVE THEM INFLUENCE HOW THE PLAN IS IMPLEMENTED.**

This means that you are willing to delegate power and authority to implement the plan in ways that they think best. Giving people authority to make decisions is significantly different than simply assigning them tasks. Effective delegation is based on an ongoing conversation, as opposed to giving people orders.

❖ **SOMETHING ELSE?**

Maybe I missed something. Perhaps there is another point in the life of your idea where you might welcome their influence.

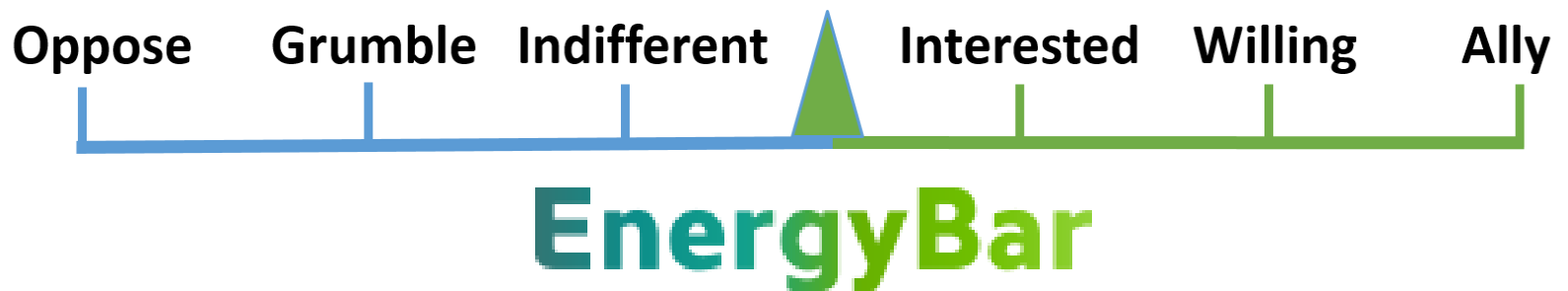
If this is a big project, there are probably many different individuals and groups that you'll need to consider. I urge you to avoid lumping these people together, since your own comfort and level of trust may vary significantly from individual to individual, or from group to group. Consequently, your approach to influencing them could differ considerably.

### ③ What's the gap between the energy you need and the energy you are likely to get?

If you need support, you need energy. But, energy can work for you or against you.

The Energy Bar™ will help you identify any gaps in energy between what you need and what you might get. For example, you might need them to be strong vocal champions for your project, but they are likely to roll their eyes and wonder why you are wasting their time talking about this topic again.

**DETERMINE THE GAP BETWEEN THE ENERGY YOU NEED AND THE ENERGY YOU ARE LIKELY TO GET.**





## A. USE THE ENERGY BAR TO DETERMINE THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT YOU NEED.

Put an X at the point that indicates how much support you need from them. You've got three options.

### ❖ **ALLY OR CHAMPION.**

This is the strongest level of support. You need this person or that group to be 100% with you.

### ❖ **WILLING.**

You need them to be willing to try something new. Maybe it's a pilot test. Maybe you are asking them to take part in one portion of a project. All you are asking for is a short-term commitment.

### ❖ **INTERESTED.**

You don't need them to do a thing, you just need them to have an interest in what you're talking about. For now, you just need their energy to be on the positive side of The Energy Bar™.



**B. NEXT, PLACE AN X TO INDICATE THE ENERGY YOU ARE LIKELY TO GET.**

You've got seven possible options.

The energy you think you'll get could be any of the *three* levels listed above: **ALLY, WILLING, OR INTERESTED**. Or, it may be one of four below.

❖ **LACK OF INTEREST.**

This suggests that they see no connection between themselves and what you're talking about. They are not against you, they just aren't interested in what you are talking about.

❖ **GRUMBLING.**

The grumbling might not be audible, but people are doing things that work against whatever idea you're promoting. For instance, you might have a hard time getting on their calendars. . . or they make promises that they don't keep. . . or they send other people to the meeting. . . or they act confused much of the time. . . or they have emotional outbursts. . . or they say nasty things when you're not around.

❖ **ACTIVE RESISTANCE.**

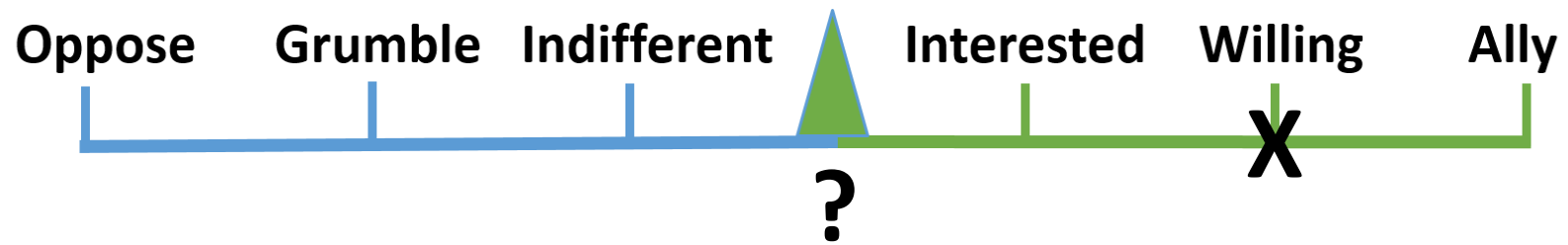
Their energy is actively opposing you and your idea.

❖ **NOT SURE.**

The final possible response is "I don't know where their energy is likely to be." If that's the case, place a large "?" somewhere on The Energy Bar™ scale.



If you answered with a question mark, that should get your attention. It suggests that you don't know much about the people you are trying to influence. It's hard to influence people we don't know. (The next section of this paper can help you turn a question mark into an X on The Energy Bar™ scale.)



# 4

## Why is their energy where it is today? (or where you think it is likely to be when you introduce your idea)

If you want to influence them, you must know *why* their energy is indifferent, grumbling, opposed, or simply less than you need it to be.

I have identified their levels of support and/or resistance.

### TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THIS PERSON OR GROUP UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION?

Do they understand the challenges, risks, opportunities, shifts in demographics, shifts in the business and political landscape that relate to whatever you believe needs to be addressed? **(I call this Level 1—support or resistance.)**

### WHAT'S THEIR PERSONAL EMOTIONAL REACTION TO WHATEVER IT IS YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT?

Perhaps they are excited, enthusiastic, energized, and eager to start addressing this issue. Or perhaps they are deeply frightened by what might happen to them if this new program, new way of working, etc., goes into effect. **(This is Level 2— it has to do with emotions.)**

### TO WHAT EXTENT DO THEY TRUST YOU TO HANDLE SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

Do they believe that you have what it takes to lead this undertaking? Or do they believe that you're a flavor-of-the-month kind of leader? **(Level 3 is the most critical. It focuses on trust. )**

Based on your history together, their trust (or lack thereof) may be directed at you personally. Or, it could be based on who you represent. For instance, people in the region may not trust headquarters staff. People from one department may not trust the motives of people from another department. Or, it could be even deeper, and their positive or negative reaction could be based on gender, race, age, or cultural similarities or differences.

Knowing the where they are on Level 1, 2, and 3 creates what I call, “the list.” The list is the foundation for virtually all of the work I do with clients. These answers give us the information we need to begin building support. Without this vital information, you are flying without radar.

Identifying **Level 1 (knowledge)**, **Level 2 (emotional reactions)**, and **Level 3 (trust issues)** is essential, but it can be difficult for leaders to learn about these things. Although you’re probably a nice person, and you want people to tell you the truth, the folks you are trying to influence have learned to be wary of people in power. And the higher you are in the organization, the more likely that people are going to give you softer answers.

If you have difficulty figuring out what’s on the list, then I urge you to take a look at a free eBook that I wrote titled [The Magic List](#). You also might be interested in a [two-minute video](#) where I explain what the list is all about.

Download  
[‘The Magic List’](#)

Watch 2-minute  
[Video](#)

## Some ideas for shifting energy.

Here are a few short videos in which I tell you about people who successfully shifted energy in their organizations. I hope you'll take a look at those that seem like they might be relevant to your situation or your organization. Then, think about how you might adapt even one of the ideas so that it works for you.

### **YOU NEED THEM TO BE INTERESTED BUT THEY ARE GRUMBLING.**

Grumbling makes it harder to get your point across or even to find out who might be supporting you. If this description fits, then watch the video below, which shares the story of a group of extremely smart people who were able to put their egos aside and learn from each other.



**YOU NEED THEIR SUPPORT BUT THEY STRONGLY OPPOSE.**

This situation is the most challenging. Your energy is moving one way, and the person you are trying to influence is moving in the opposite direction. There are no quick, easy fixes for this situation, but if you are willing, there are steps you can take to change this situation.



**YOU NEED THEM TO TRY OUT YOUR IDEA BUT THEY AREN'T INTERESTED.**

You probably need people to be willing to give your idea a chance—pitch in, offer feedback, try it out, and just generally go along with the change. The problem is they aren't interested. Your idea doesn't trouble them; they just don't believe it affects them. Their lack of interest could hinder your progress.



### **PEOPLE DON'T THINK YOUR IDEA AFFECTS THEM.**

People don't believe that this idea or change affects them. They aren't against you, they just don't think that what you're talking about applies to them. Or, it might actually be something different. It could be their lack of interest really masks something deeper. While it may seem that they are sitting there, quietly bored, their opposition runs deeper, but you can't see it since they aren't talking.



You can see many more one to three-minute videos at: [www.energybartools.com/resources](http://www.energybartools.com/resources).



## Some tips.

I urge you to start small. When you try something new, stay inside (or near the inside edge of your comfort zone). If you try something big that makes you and the organization nervous, you could risk getting defensive and saying things that could make matters worse.

A few simple things to consider.

### **MAKE SURE THE RIGHT PEOPLE ARE IN THE ROOM.**

These are people who are important to you and the project. Avoid that back row of chairs filled with observers. These people often seem like lurkers and they can sap energy from otherwise healthy conversations. . . And avoid just filling up the room with lots of people. Everyone who attends should be there for a reason.

### **MAKE SURE THE MEETING SPACE IS RIGHT FOR THE WORK.**

I have been in too many planning meetings held in conference rooms. Those long tables get in the way of face-to-face conversation. Please don't let the convenience of an available large room get in the way of holding out for a space that will work for you.

### **MAKE SURE THE TECHNOLOGY WORKS.**

If you need to meet these people in a virtual setting, be sure to check, double-check, and triple-check to ensure that the technology works. (Sadly, I have had a lot of experiences where the technology let us down.)

**MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PLAN FOR THE MEETING.**

Create an agenda that encourages active conversation.

If trust is low between you and the stakeholder, then finding ways to begin to rebuild that bridge will be a critical part of this step.

**AND THINK ABOUT OTHER THINGS THAT HAVE WORKED WELL IN YOUR ORGANIZATION.**



## An offer.

You read the book.

You were willing to be influenced by the people who you want to influence.

You completed The Energy Bar™ assessment and thought about next steps.

But, you're still a little concerned about engaging those folks. If so, give me a call. I'll bet if you and I spent 15 to 20 minutes on the phone, we could come up with some ideas that you could try out immediately. I love these highly-focused short practical conversations.

Since you took time to dig into this e-book, as a thanks you there will be no charge for this call. Email me to schedule a call at [rick@rickmaurer.com](mailto:rick@rickmaurer.com).



## About Rick Maurer

I work with senior leaders on ways to build support for change. Some leaders put me on retainer, others bring me in to assist on a particular project, and others just want to have a couple of conversations about leading change. I've worked with clients in the industries of aerospace, healthcare, chemicals, government, high-tech, and others.

I also offer speaking and strategic work session opportunities from keynote speeches at large-scale conferences to short seminars and breakout sessions on avoiding resistance and building support for change. I call my approach, Change without Migraines™. It is based on my book, *Beyond the Wall of Resistance* (Bard Press 1996, revised 2010).

If you need help applying any of the actions I discuss in this paper, or help figuring out how people view your leadership during change, I can help.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Maurer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "r".

For more information visit [energybartools.com](http://energybartools.com). Or you can contact me at [rick@rickmaurer.com](mailto:rick@rickmaurer.com) or 703 525-7074.

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