

Chapter 8

Understanding Resistance

THE HARDEST PART of consulting is coping successfully with resistance from the client. As we consult, it is natural for us to feel that if we can present our ideas clearly and logically, and if we have the best interests of the client at heart, our clients will accept our expertise and follow our suggestions. We soon discover that, no matter how reasonably we present data and recommendations, clients present us with resistance.

Resistance doesn't always happen, but when it does, it is puzzling and frustrating. In the face of resistance, we begin to view the client as stubborn and irrational, and we usually end up simply presenting the data and justifying the recommendations more loudly and more forcibly.

The key to understanding the nature of resistance is to realize that resistance is a reaction to an emotional process taking place within the client. It is not a reflection of the conversation we are having with the client on an objective, logical, rational level. Resistance is a predictable, natural, emotional reaction against the process of being helped and against the process of having to face up to difficult organizational problems.

Resistance is a predictable, natural, and necessary part of the learning process. When as consultants we wish resistance would never appear or would just go away, we are, by that attitude, posing an obstacle to the client's really integrating and learning from our expertise. For a client to learn something important about how to handle a difficult problem, the feelings of resistance need to be expressed directly before the client is ready to genuinely accept and use what the consultant has to offer.

The skill in dealing with resistance is to:

- Be able to identify when resistance is taking place
- View resistance as a natural process and a sign that you are on target
- Support the client in expressing the resistance directly

Not take the expression of the resistance personally or as an attack on you or your competence.

This is hard to do and is what this chapter and the next are all about.

The Faces of Resistance

Resistance takes many forms, some of them very subtle and elusive. In the course of a single meeting, you may encounter a variety of forms. As you begin to deal with it in one form, sometimes it will fade and reappear in a different body.



For technically oriented consultants—such as engineers, accountants, computer and systems people—resistance can be very hard to identify. Our technical backgrounds so orient us to data, facts, and logic that when we are asked to perceive an emotional or interpersonal process, it is like trying to see the picture on a badly out-of-focus piece of movie film.

The following list of common forms of resistance, though incomplete, is intended to help bring the picture into focus.

Give Me More Detail

The client keeps asking for finer and finer bits of information. “What do people who work the eleven-to-seven shift think?” “When you put the numbers together, what work sheets did you use and were the numbers written in red or blue ink?” The client seems to have an insatiable appetite to know everything about what is happening. No matter how much information you give the client, it is never enough. Each conversation leaves you feeling like next time you should bring even more backup data with you. You also get the feeling that a huge amount of time is spent gathering information and too little time is spent deciding what you are going to do. Some questions from the client are reasonable; they need to know what is going on. When you start to

get impatient with the questions, even though you are able to answer them, that is the moment to start suspecting the request for detail is a form of resistance and not a simple quest for information.

Flood You with Detail

A corollary to the request for detail is to be given too much detail. You ask a client how this problem got started and the response is, “Well, it all got started ten years ago on a Thursday afternoon in September. I think I was wearing a blue sweatshirt and the weather outside was overcast and threatening rain. I hope I am not boring you, but I think it is important for you to understand the background of the situation.” The client keeps giving you more and more information, which you understand less and less. The moment you start to get bored or confused about what all this has to do with the problem at hand, you should begin to suspect that what you are getting is resistance and not just an effusive attempt to give you all the facts.

Time

The client says she would really like to go ahead with your project but the timing is just a little off. You are kept on the string, but the client keeps impressing you with how busy things are right now. In fact, she barely has time to meet with you. Sometimes this form of resistance gets expressed by constant interruptions during your meetings. The client starts taking phone calls or having the secretary come in. Or someone sticks his head in the office and the client turns to me and says, “Excuse me just a minute, Pete, but I have to settle this one issue with Ann.” And the client starts talking to Ann while I sit there.

The message the client seems to be giving in all these examples?

This organization is such an exciting place to work in, something is going on all the time. Aren't you impressed and don't you wish you worked here, too?

My organization has so little time.

I have so little time.

I want you to think I am refusing you because of the lack of time, and not because your proposal gives me feelings of great discomfort.

The whole time issue, which we all face every day, is most often resistance against the client's having to tell you how he or she really feels about your project. When you find in December that the client would really like to do the project, but can't get started until the third quarter of next year, you should begin to suspect you are encountering resistance.

Impracticality

The client keeps reminding you that they live in the “Realworld and are facing Realworld problems.” I must have heard about the Realworld a thousand times—it makes me wonder where

clients think consultants live. This form of resistance from the client accuses us of being impractical and academic. As with many forms of resistance, there may be some truth in the statement, but then there is some truth in almost any statement. It is the intensity of the emphasis on “practicality” that leads you to suspect you are up against an emotional issue.

I'm Not Surprised

It is always amazing to me how important it is for people not to be surprised. It seems that whatever happens in the world is OK as long as they are not surprised. When you have completed a study, you can tell a manager that the building has collapsed, the workers have just walked out, the chief financial officer has just run off with the vice president of marketing, and the IRS is knocking on the door, and the manager's first response is, “I'm not surprised.” It's like being surprised is the worst thing in the world that could happen. The manager's fear of surprise is really the desire to always be in control. When we run into it, it is kind of deflating. It can signal to us that what we have developed is really not that important or unique and downplay our contribution. See the client's desire not to be surprised for what it is—a form of resistance and not really a reflection on your work.

Attack

The most blatant form of resistance is when the client attacks us. With angry words, a red face, pounding his fist on the desk, pointing her finger in your face, punctuating the end of every sentence. It leaves the consultant feeling like a bumbling child who not only has done poor work, but has somehow violated a line of morality that should never be crossed. Our response to attack is often either to withdraw or to respond in kind. Both responses mean that we are beginning to take the attack personally and not seeing it as one other form the resistance is taking.

Confusion

Whenever a client comes to us for help, the client is experiencing some legitimate confusion. This may not be resistance, but just a desire for clarity. After things become clear to you, however, and you explain it two or three times, and the client keeps claiming to be confused or not understand, start to think that confusion may be this client's way of resisting.

Silence

This is the toughest of all. We keep making overtures to the client and get very little response in return. The client is passive. A client may say they have no particular reaction to what you are proposing. When you ask for a reaction, he says, “Keep on going, I don't have any problems with what you are saying. If I do, I'll speak up.” Don't you believe it. Silence never means consent. If you are dealing with something important to the organization, it is not natural for the client to have no reaction. Silence means that the reaction is being blocked. For some people, silence or withholding reactions is really a fight style. They are saying by their actions, “I am holding on

so tightly to my position and my feelings, that I won't even give you words." Beware the silent client. If you think a meeting went smoothly because the manager didn't raise any objections, don't trust it. Ask yourself whether the client gave you any real support or showed any real enthusiasm or got personally involved in the action. If there were few signs of life, begin to wonder whether silence was the form the client's resistance was taking.

Intellectualizing

When a person shifts the discussion from deciding how to proceed and starts exploring theory after theory about why things are the way they are, you are face to face with intellectualizing as resistance. The client says, "A fascinating hypothesis is implied by these results. I wonder if there is an inverse relationship between this situation and the last three times we went under. The crisis seems to have raised a number of questions."

Spending a lot of energy spinning theories is a way of taking the pain out of a situation. It is a defense most of us use when we get into a tight spot. This is not to knock the value of a good theory or the need to understand what is happening to us. It is a caution against colluding with the client in engaging in ceaseless wondering when the question is whether you and the client are going to be able to face up to a difficult situation. The time to suspect intellectualizing is when it begins at a high-tension moment or in a high-tension meeting. When this happens, your task is to bring the discussion back to actions, away from theories.

Moralizing

Moralizing resistance makes great use of certain words and phrases: "those people" and "should" and "they need to understand." When you hear them being used, you know you are about to go on a trip into a world of how things ought to be, which is simply a moralizing defense against reality. People use the phrase "those people" about anyone who's not in the room at the time. It is a phrase of superiority used in describing people who (1) are usually at a lower organizational level than the speaker, or (2) are unhappy about something the speaker has done and, therefore, "really don't understand the way things have to be."

Phrases of superiority are actually ways of putting oneself on a pedestal. Pedestal sitting is always a defense against feeling some uncomfortable feelings and taking some uncomfortable actions.

The phrase "they need to understand" means "I understand—they don't. Why don't they see things clearly and with the same broad perspective that I do? Ah, the burdens of knowing are great and unceasing!" Frequently "those people" the speaker is talking about do understand. They understand perfectly. The problem (for the speaker) is that they don't agree. So instead of confronting the conflict in views, the speaker escapes into a moralistic position.

Moralizing can be seductive to the consultant. The moralizing manager is inviting you to join him or her in a very select circle of people who know what is best for "those people" and who know what they "need to understand." This is an elite position to be in; it has the feeling of power and it is well-protected—if the rest of the organization does not appreciate what you do, this is

just further indication how confused they are and how much more they need you! Resist the temptation with as much grace and persistence as possible.

Compliance

The most difficult form of resistance to see comes from the compliant manager who totally agrees with you and eagerly wants to know what to do next. It is hard to see compliance as resistance because you are getting exactly what you want—agreement and respect. If you really trust the concept that in each manager there is some ambivalence about your help, then when you get no negative reaction at all, you know something is missing.

Each client has some reservations about a given course of action. If the reservations don't get expressed to you, they will come out somewhere else, perhaps in a more destructive way. I would rather the reservations were said directly to me; then I can deal with them. You can tell when the agreeable client is resisting by compliance. You are getting this form of resistance any time there is almost total absence of any reservations and a low energy agreement. If the agreement is made with high energy, and enthusiasm and sincere understanding of what we are facing, you might simply feel lucky and not take it as resistance, even if there are few reservations expressed. But beware the client who expresses a desire to quickly get to solutions without any discussion of problems—also the client who acts very dependent on you and implies that whatever you do is fine.

Methodology

If there has been elaborate data collection in your project, the first wave of questions will be about your methods. If you administered a questionnaire, you will be asked about how many people responded, at what level of response, and whether the findings are statistically significant at the .05 level. Next will be questions about how people in the guardhouse and on the night shift responded.

Questions about method represent legitimate needs for information for the first ten minutes. Ten minutes is enough for you to establish the credibility of the project if the questions are really for information. As the questions about method go past the ten-minute mark, you should cautiously begin to view them as resistance. The purpose of the meeting is not to grill you on methods; you probably got out of school some time ago. The purpose of the meeting is to understand the problem and decide what to do about it. Repeated questions about method or suggestions of alternate methods can serve to delay the discussion of problems and actions.

Flight into Health

Undoubtedly the most subtle form of resistance occurs when, somewhere in the middle or toward the end of the project, it appears that the client no longer has the problem that you were addressing in the first place. As you get closer and closer to the time for the client to face the issue and act on the problem, you begin to hear about how much better things seem to be getting.

Here are some variations on this theme.

If profits were bad when you started the project, as soon as they start to pick up a little, the manager comes to you and says that people seem to be feeling better now that the profit picture has improved. Maybe the need for your services has diminished somewhat.

You talk to the client in May and agree to start the project on June 20. When you call on June 10 to confirm the beginning of the project, the manager says, "We can still begin the project if we want to, but for some reason, it appears the problem is not so severe." Nothing can be identified that changed the way the group does business ... what happened was the group realized that on June 20 they were really going to have to start confronting their problems, so it seemed easier to act as if the problems weren't so important now.

I worked as a consultant to a company where the engineering and manufacturing groups were having a difficult time working together. In the study, I learned the groups had a ten-year history of conflict at all levels, the president of the company had sided with the manufacturing group and was constantly attacking the engineering group, and responsibilities and authority between the two groups were overlapping and unclear. Just before I was to feed back the results of the study, the president called me and said that the head of engineering was changing jobs. He felt now that this one person was leaving, the problems would probably go away. He was holding onto the good feeling that this person was leaving as a way of not confronting the underlying problems facing these groups for the last ten years.

The manager's process of resisting through health is similar to what happens when the fighting couple finally makes an appointment with a marriage counselor: As the session approaches, they find they are getting along better and better. By the time they get to the marriage counselor, they look at each other and say they aren't quite sure what the problems were because they have been getting along so well lately. Of course, there is nothing wrong with the situation improving for the client, but most surface symptoms have underlying problems that require attention. If all of a sudden the client is telling you that the symptoms are improving, I would be concerned that they are grasping for improvement too dearly and are smoothing over what should be the real focus of your consultation.

Pressing for Solutions

The last form of resistance is the client's desire for solutions, solutions, solutions. "Don't talk to me about problems, I want to hear solutions." Because the consultant is also eager to see the problems solved, some collusion can take place between consultant and client if the discussion of solutions is not held off a little.

The desire for solutions can prevent the client from learning anything important about the nature of the problem. It also keeps the client dependent on consultants to solve these problems. If the line manager hasn't the patience or stomach to stop and examine the problem, then the solutions are not going to be implemented very effectively. Recognize that the rush to solutions can be a

defense and a particularly seductive form of resistance for the consultant who is eager to solve problems.

What Are Clients Resisting When They Are Resisting Us?

Sounds like a song title, but it's important for you to know.

The main thing to do in coping successfully with resistance is to not take it personally. When you encounter resistance, you are the one in the room. Clients look straight at *you* while they are being defensive. You are the one who has to answer the questions and weather the storm. It is natural to feel that the resistance is aimed at you. The resistance is not aimed at you. It is not you the client is defending against. Resistant clients are defending against the fact that they are going to have to make a difficult choice, take an unpopular action, confront some reality that they have emotionally been trying to avoid.

If you have been brought in to solve a problem, it means the client organization has not been able to solve it themselves. It is not that they aren't smart enough to solve it. The reason they have not been able to solve it is they have not been able to see it clearly. They are so close to the problem and have such an emotional investment in any possible solutions, that they have needed an outsider to come in and define the problem and possible solutions for them. In the problem or solution, there is some **difficult reality** that the client has had a hard time seeing and confronting.

The **difficult realities** that clients are stuck on will vary.

Someone may have to be fired or told that they are not performing adequately.

People in the group may be very dissatisfied and the manager may be reluctant to surface the dissatisfaction.

The manager may feel inadequate in some part of the job and not want to face that inadequacy.

The political situation may be very risky and the manager doesn't want to make waves.

The task at hand may require skills that do not exist in the organization now. This may mean getting rid of some people, which is always hard to do.

The manager's boss may be part of the problem, and the manager may not want to confront the boss.

The organization may be selling products or services to a declining market and this is too discouraging to deal with.

The manager knows he operates autocratically, doesn't want to change, yet sees the negative effects of it.

A developmental project in which a lot of money has been invested is turning up some negative results. This means bad news has to be sent up the line, and promises made earlier will be taken back.

All these **difficult realities** involve painful problems that seem to promise painful solutions. Most very technical or business-related problems are in some way caused or maintained by how that problem is being managed. When managers are being defensive, they are defending their own managerial adequacy—a natural thing to defend. It is even worthwhile defending. A resistant manager is much more concerned about his or her own esteem and competence than about our skills as consultants.

This is what resistance is about—defending against some **difficult reality** and how the manager has been handling it. We consultants come in and, as part of our job, start pointing to the **difficult realities**. It is important that we help the client face the difficulties. We shouldn't avoid them just because the client will become resistant.

When you encounter resistance, you are seeing the surface expression of more underlying anxieties. Two things are happening.

1. The client is feeling uncomfortable, and
2. The client is expressing the discomfort indirectly.

The reason consultants feel the victim of the resistance is that the client's discomfort is being expressed indirectly. If the client were able to be authentic and put the concern directly into words by saying, "I am concerned I am losing control of this group," or "I feel I am ill-equipped to handle this particular situation," or "People expect things from me that I just can't deliver," we consultants would not feel attacked. We would feel very supportive toward the manager.

The manager's *direct* expression of underlying concerns is not resistance. Resistance occurs only when the concerns about facing the difficult realities and the choice not to deal with them are expressed *indirectly*. They are expressed indirectly by blaming lack of detailed data, not enough time, impracticality, not enough budget, lack of understanding by "those people," and so on, as the reasons we should not proceed with a project or implement some recommendations.

Underlying Concerns

If I am facing resistance and I am trying to understand what the client is really concerned about, I would wager the client was concerned about either **control** or **vulnerability**.

If what you are suggesting does not generate *some* resistance from the client, it is probably because your proposal does not threaten the manager's control or feeling of organizational security.

Control

Maintaining control is at the center of the value system of most organizations. There is a belief in control that goes beyond effectiveness or good organizational performance. Many managers believe in maintaining control even if keeping control results in *poorer performance*. There is case after case demonstrating that more participative forms of management are more productive, yet the practice of participative management is not too common. I have seen a division of one company where the controls on the management information system were proven to be a major obstacle to improving productivity, yet the manager chose to keep the controls at the expense of better performance.

Control is the coin of the realm in organizations. The whole reward system is geared around how much control, responsibility, and authority you have. When you perform well, you don't get much more money, you get more control. At some point in history, organizations realized that you can't pay people enough money to commit themselves like they do, so instead, control is held up as the reward.

The message in all this is that control is valued very, very highly. There is nothing wrong with having control, and being out of control is a very anxious state to be in. When we get resistance, one good guess why is the manager feels he or she is going to lose control.

Vulnerability

Concern that the manager will get hurt is the second major issue that gives rise to most of the resistance that we encounter. Organizations are systems that are competitive and political. It is very important to stay ahead of your peers, stay in favor with your boss, and maintain the loyalty and support of your subordinates. To do all three of these and also get your job done is difficult. As you move up an organization and deal with people at higher and higher levels, you realize that the feeling of being judged and having to prove yourself again and again is part of *every* position in the organization, all the way up to the chief executive officer.

Politics is the exercise of power. Organizations operate like political systems, except there is no voting. The impact your consulting project has on the political situation and the power of your client is a very important consideration. When you get resistance, it may be that you are unintentionally disturbing whatever political equilibrium has been established.

An example:

In a research and development department, the group doing exploratory research had always reigned supreme and independent. The product development groups were much more tightly controlled, held accountable for short-term results. We were asked to help in restructuring the whole R&D department because the R&D vice president had a strong feeling that inefficiencies and overlap existed and the department was not operating as one organization. During the project, most of the resistance came from the exploratory research

group. They would come late to meetings and question our methods, and then be silent and say, "Whatever you think is fine with us."

So, what was behind their resistance? Were our methods really faulty? Did they object to the technical basis on which our project was established? No. What they were resisting was the fact that right now they were in a favored and powerful organizational position. They had high status, high autonomy, and a free hand at gathering resources and starting projects of their choosing. Underneath all the technical and structural questions they had, they were worried about losing status in the political system.

Their concern had some legitimacy. If an exploratory research group loses all its independence, the long-run picture for new products is dim. Yet the group's political concern—losing power in the organization—was expressed very indirectly and was therefore very hard to deal with. When they finally stated their concern directly and reduced the resistance, a compromise could be worked out with the VP and the product development group.

Summary: When you encounter resistance, try to understand it. Look for client concerns about control and vulnerability.

Sometimes It Is Not Resistance

As Freud once said when he was asked whether the cigar he was smoking was also a phallic symbol, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar"; sometimes client objections are not resistance. The client just doesn't want to do the project.

We can all become paranoid by interpreting every line manager's objections as resistance covering some underlying anxieties. If a manager says directly, "No, I do not choose to begin this project. I don't believe in it," that is not resistance. There is nothing in that statement that blames the consultant or presses the responsibility for the difficulties on the consultant. The manager is taking responsibility for his or her own organization and has a right to choose. If we think it is the wrong choice, well, that's life.

We are getting paid to consult, not to manage. If a manager says to me, "I am in too vulnerable a position to begin this project now," I feel appreciative of the direct expression. I know where I stand with that manager. I don't have to worry whether I should have done something differently. I also feel the manager understands the project and knows the risks, and it turned out that the risks were just too high. I may be disappointed that the project didn't go, but the process was flawless.

The Fear and the Wish

Although sometimes consultants and clients may act like adversaries, their feelings and concerns are frequently complementary. There are some common client fears that correspond to similar consultant fears. The same is true for wishes. There are three that bring you down and three that lift you up.

Client Fears

Helplessness. Futility. I have no power to change the situation. I am a victim.

Alienation from the organization and people around me. No one cares about me nor do I care about them. I don't belong here.

Confusion. I have too much information. I can't sort it out or see clearly.

Consultant Fears

I can have no impact. No reward for the effort.

Distance from the client. We will remain strangers. We will never get close. I'll have to stay totally "in role."

I have too little information. They won't or can't tell me what is really happening.

Helplessness ... alienation ... confusion are all underlying concerns that can cause the client to be resistant if expressed indirectly. Their indirect expression can create similar discomfort in the consultant. The way out is to help the client express them directly in words.

We can also look at the flip side of fear and resistance and identify the underlying potential for each client. Each client also has the possibility of flawlessness. As the client moves in this direction, the task of the consultant becomes easier.

Client Potential

Has choices and the power to act on the situation. Is an actor, not a victim.

Engages the situation. Feels a part of it. Moves toward the difficult reality and tension.

Choices are clear. Mass of information is simplified.

Consultant Potential

High impact. Clear payoff for effort expended.

Can be authentic and intimate. No "role" behavior.

Is included with all information. Sees situation with clarity.

Reaching this potential is one of the objectives of any consultation. The client and consultant are taking responsibility for themselves and the situation they are in. The process of dealing with resistance helps the client move from a position of helplessness, alienation, and confusion to a position of choice, engagement, and clarity. The consultant accomplishes this by internally moving from feelings of low impact, distance, and poor information to a position of high impact, authenticity, and clarity.

Being Dependent, Asking for Help

The climates of most organizations are not conducive to managers' asking for help. Organizations tend to be quite competitive, and asking for help from a staff group or other consultants can be seen as a sign of weakness. Our culture also signals early, especially in men's lives, that we should be able to solve our own problems and not have to be dependent on anyone else for anything. Being a client goes against the stream of these organizational and cultural messages. It is not easy. Resistance comes in part from the discomforts of being dependent and asking for help.

There is a closely related feeling that also makes being a client difficult—the feeling that nothing can be done to help. Before the consultant is allowed in, the manager has tried to solve the problem with limited or no success. This can lead to the unstated belief that the problem is unsolvable, that the group or manager is so set in his ways that the problem must be lived with, not resolved. The manager is feeling beyond help. When you encounter resistance, this possibility should be explored. When the manager is feeling very pessimistic that the prospect of being helped is remote, this stance itself is your immediate obstacle to solving the problem. No technical solutions will suffice if the manager has no energy to try it. The manager's feeling of being beyond help is usually not that conscious. The consultant's task is to bring it to the level of awareness. When the manager examines the feeling of futility, hope usually rises.

Wanting Confirmation, Not Change

When we ask for help, we want both a solution to the problem and confirmation that everything we have done has been perfect.

A colleague of mine, Neale Clapp, mentioned one day that people entering therapy want confirmation, not change. On the surface, it would be ridiculous for a client to bring in a consultant for help, and then tell the consultant that no change was desired and the client did not really want to learn anything. This would not be rational. But that is the point. Resistance is an emotional process, not a rational or intellectual process.

In the world of emotions, two opposite feelings can exist at the same time. And both can be genuine. Clients may sincerely want to learn and solve problems. At the same time they also want support and to be told that they are handling that problem better than anyone else in the country. Approach—avoidance. The resistance is the avoidance. Right behind the avoidance, you will find the approach. When we help the resistance get expressed, it diminishes and we are then working with a client who is ready and willing to learn and be influenced. Flawlessly dealing with resistance is understanding the two-headed nature of being in the client position—and accepting it as OK.

When a line manager has a problem and results are suffering, at least the extent of the suffering is known. The manager has a very clear idea of how bad things are and has learned to live with the difficulty. The manager may not like the difficulty, but has learned to cope with it. We as consultants come along and offer an alternative way of solving the problem. With the offer is the

promise that the new situation will be better than the old situation: There will be less suffering, results will improve. This promise carries the manager into the unknown; it requires a change.

Fear of the unknown is a major cause of resistance. Simply because the unknown is uncertain, unpredictable. We all see couples who have been married for ten years and seem to be suffering every minute they are together. We wonder why they stay together. Perhaps it is because at least they know how bad things can get. They know what the downside looks like, and they know they can survive. There is comfort in knowing what to expect. To separate would be unpredictable. The fear of coping with unpredictability may be greater than the pain of staying together.

Organizations also value predictability. The wish of systems to remain predictable (don't surprise me) is a defense the consultant has to deal with continually.

Not surprisingly, organizations that are in serious trouble tend to be the most difficult clients. They need to change the most and are least able to do it. For low-performing organizations, the tension of failure is so high that they are unable to take one more risk and so hold onto their unsatisfactory performance. In these extreme cases, there is probably not much consultants can do to surface the resistance to change. We may just have to accept it.

Ogres and Angels

In any organization, there are certain managers who are well-known for their disdain for staff groups and internal consultants. In workshops for people in the same organization—whether they are in personnel, auditing, or engineering—the groups can all name the one or two managers at pretty high levels who are ogres in the eyes of the staff consultants. The ogres are seen as stubborn, autocratic, insensitive to feelings—the Captain Ahab of industry. When the subject of resistance comes up, the ogres are mentioned. We all seem to need at least one impossible client in our lives, the client who becomes the lightning rod of our frustrations in consulting. There is also a fatal attraction to the ogres—they embody some consultants' wish to be all-powerful, and successful.

Ogres don't really exist. A number of times I have heard how fire-eating and mean a certain manager is, and then actually met with the person. I approach the meeting with a lot of discomfort, not wanting to be the latest casualty. What happens is the conversation soon turns to the ogres in the ogre's life. Ogres are not really consumed with vengeance for consultants—they are worried about the people who are giving *them* a hard time. Behind the ogre's blustery facade are the same concerns all managers have—about losing control and becoming vulnerable. The more aggressive the client, the more intense are the concerns and the more the client needs support.

Angels are also one-sided images. Every group I have worked with can name a manager who is willing to do anything they ask. A progressive manager, open, trusting, risk-taking, secure, intelligent, good-looking. There are no angels either. Angels have a hard time saying no directly. There is a part of the most supportive manager that has reservations, avoids confronting real

issues, and wants to maintain the status quo. We need to help that side get expressed. For the manager's sake and for our own sake.

... and Heroics

The need for a heroic self-image is another myth about consulting that ought to be laid to rest. We think that we should be able to overcome all obstacles. No matter how difficult the client, or how tough the problem, or how tight the time schedule—we believe it is up to us to do the best we can. This wish to be the heroic consultant more than anything else leads into taking bad contracts. Heroics often entail a hidden bargain. If we take on this bad job now, we will be rewarded later with plums. The essence of the hidden bargain is that it is assumed and never spoken. The rewards in doing consulting need to be in the present project. If it has no reward, the project should be challenged.

This heroic impulse in the consultant is the consultant's own resistance against facing the realities of a difficult project. Resist taking unstable or unrealistic contracts. If you can't say no, say later. If you can't say later, say little. Heroes have a hard life. The rewards are overrated. Most heroes, unless you are the best in the world, get paid just about what you are making right now.