



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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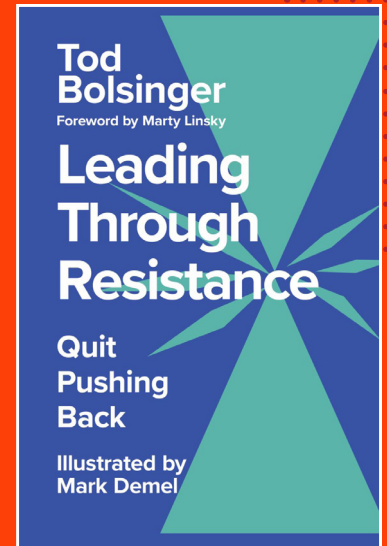
THE NUTSHELL OF LEADING THROUGH RESISTANCE

By Tod Bolsinger
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When the going gets tough, most leaders freak out. We like to imagine we'd stay calm and creative, but under fire we become little Caesars determined to get our way. Research calls this "threat-rigidity," which Columbia Business School professor Rita McGrath explains occurs when we're "under threat" and "narrow [our] focus of attention, fall back on habits from the past, and simplify in a way that doesn't take account of the true challenge."

"Resistance ... is part and parcel of the leadership process," Edwin Friedman wrote, and "sabotage is not merely something to be avoided or wished away; instead, it comes with the territory of leading." Leaders who have long relied on power or sheer will may find this jarring, yet adaptive leadership focuses on the growth of people to be able to face their greatest challenges and thrive.

People routinely experience change as loss. Even necessary and good changes are experienced as losses that the most committed people must endure and to which they must adapt. Instead of trying to eliminate resistance, we must lead through it.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center teaches a mantra: “Start with conviction. Stay calm. Stay connected. Stay the course.” We don’t manipulate people into compliance; we walk with them to lower their resistance and join us in a new shared direction. As in jujitsu, if you push on someone, they push back, but if you feel their push and use their effort to your advantage, you can pull them where you need them to go.

The first question about leading change is not about change, but about what will *not* change. This requires holding a dual conviction: “We will protect and maintain our organization’s core purpose and values,” and “we must be prepared to adapt” in new circumstances.

“When emotionally upset,” Daniel Goleman reminds

us, “people cannot remember, attend, learn, or make decisions clearly.” Leaders must manage their own reactivity and stay calm, curious, and connected. Seek first to understand and then to be understood.

When you make the conscious decision to resist pushing back against pushback, you can pull them and move forward together: “Leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading people to work toward a common goal.”

