



Toolkit Page 145 Know When to Walk Away

The great philosopher, Kenny Rogers, once sang, “You’ve got to know when to hold ‘em, when to fold ‘em, and when to walk away.” He could have been singing about corporate change.

- There are times when you should play your hand and go ahead with a major change
- There are also times when you’ve been dealt a lousy hand, and the best thing to do is to sit out the hand and wait for the next round.
- There are times when you shouldn’t even stay in the game because you’re going to lose badly.

When to Hold ‘Em

Obviously, this is usually pretty easy to figure out. For instance:

- People feel a strong need for a change
- People have the skills they need to make this change a success
- You have the skills and motivation to lead this change well

Unfortunately, organizations tend to treat all changes as if this were the right time and that they’ve got the right people to make it a success. They fail to grasp the complexities of change.

When to Fold ‘Em

Usually timing is critical. Here are some things that might suggest the timing is less than ideal. No need to give up on your idea, but pay attention to when the time is right. No matter how badly you want to go sailing, it is hard to get a large ship out of port during low tide. You’ll make much faster progress (with less dragging) if you just wait for high tide.

- People have just gone through a major change in the same area. For instance, you are trying to build support for a new integrated software system right on the heels of another similar effort that bombed.
- You just took over you're your current job and people are skeptical of you or the position you hold. Perhaps you are stepping into a Level 3 situation and people haven't had time to get to know you and what you stand for. Every step you take will be watched and evaluated.
- People are burned out. As Daryl Conner suggests in *Managing at the Speed of Change*, people may lack the resilience to take on something else.
- Complete the Support for Change Questionnaire. (see this Toolkit for access to this assessment tool) If most scores are very low, it may indicate that many bridges need to be built before you can attempt a major change.

When to Consider Walking Away

Some situations may be too important to walk away. Those who stand for civil rights may be willing to endure all manner of defeat and abuse because the value of the outcome is so great. Few changes in organizations rise to that exalted level. Sometimes we stick with losing games simply because we don't want to admit that we are going to lose.

So, if. . .

- You've tried many of the ideas in *Beyond the Wall of Resistance* and you've gotten nowhere
- People threaten you. Not idle threats, but you feel you are at risk.
- People are abusive. Not just once or twice, but their primary way of relating to you is abusive.

- You seem to be a visionary in an organization that values things as they've always been. You may be a prophet in the wrong land. Ask yourself, Do I really want to be a visionary leader without followers, or do I want to get something done? Some people like being the only one who sees the "truth" and repeated failure just confirms that they are the only one gifted with these divine powers. If you're one of those people, get off it, and go get a job where you have to get something done.

. . . it might be time to walk away.

Good luck in choosing the right course for you and your organization.

© **2010 Rick Maurer**. Rick uses his Change without Migraines™ to advise organizations on how to lead change effectively. He is author of many books including *Beyond the Wall of Resistance*. In 2009, he created the Change Management Open Source Project, a free resource for people interested in change in organizations. You can access the open source project as well as many free articles and tools from his web site: www.rickmaurer.com

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