

# Debbie Nicol on leadership and change: take the positive from any resistance

Debbie Nicol

January 31, 2016 Updated: February 2, 2016 12:37 PM



## Related

The likeability link to good leadership

A leader's physical presence will make the difference

Qualities that earn leaders high accolades

Survival boot camp puts leaders to the test

Fear factor does not hold back effective leaders

Topics: [Management](#)

‘That’s the way we’ve always done it.’

These words send shivers down the spines of leaders – or do they? One success factor of true leaders and change specialists is an appreciation of differing perspectives that everyone displays. When the leader’s path collides with one that displays a reticence to change and take new directions, these words are simply an opportunity to explore three important questions:

- What is hidden behind the words “that’s the way we’ve always done it”?
- Why does that hidden reality have power over an individual’s performance?
- Do these words determine the degree of willingness of that person to “co-produce” a differing future, one of hope?

## What is indeed behind these words?

Words remain words alone unless they are considered along with an emotional intensity and context.

In organisational settings during periods of change, these words spotlight a concern that is likely to have resulted from a lack of understanding. This may or may not have already morphed into resistance. These words may be shared as a means of gaining attention or subconsciously uttered, providing insight into a pain festering within. They may even be intended to open a general discussion showing a curiosity to know more.

What’s behind these words is an emotional reaction to a suggestion of change; destabilisation is a real option for those who utter these words. It’s at this stage an individual’s context will become evident, as throughout a leader’s efforts to work with this situation, what is driving the resister will become apparent. Is it something physical that will be exposed, challenged or depleted through the change? Is it something mental where limited cognition is perceived as a barrier or disruptive factor? Is it a concern based on socio-economic reasons that has the person worried?

Ultimately, a need for “more” is present. For the current behaviour to convert to a new norm, an individual will require more awareness as to the reasons for change which then should feed into more of a desire to make the change happen, and even more need for knowledge of how to change.

## Why does that possess power over personal performance at work?

Emotional responses are charged with energy. That energy is invested in the tightening of a person’s grip around “the tried, true and trusted”. Survival mode kicks in and while the “need for more” exists, it will be secondary at this stage; workplace performance, counselling or assistance has no place on the agenda.

When energy is channelled into the survival mechanism, flight or fight syndrome is activated. For those who choose flight, the reaction is swift and sudden. For those who choose fight, the journey can be long, worrisome and arduous. Both negate any chance of workplace performance, as the template of the “known” is all-important; even if there was an interest in work, the effort going into “hanging on” is exhausting and depletive. Stability is at risk and there’s great likelihood for loss.

Human beings by instinct choose to be forward-facing, rejecting any form of loss, deprivation or reduction of benefit and self-worth.

### **What is the degree of willingness to “co-produce” a future of hope?**

“Co-production” is about a willingness of both parties to be involved in a situation. The leader who sees opportunity in reticence can reduce the chance of fear, increase the opportunity of “the known”, increase the probability of some form of stability to return as soon as possible and reduce the chance of loss. By doing so, they will appreciate the age-old Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, providing for the foundation of safety, security and self-esteem before expecting creativity, problem solving and a willingness to contribute.

Leaders in touch with their senses should not miss indicators of inner misalignments and negative influence. Indicators exist in the spoken word and in overt and covert body language.

Let’s celebrate negative indicators as an opportunity, recognise the vulnerability that comes hand-in-hand with reticence and take it into the land of greater understanding.

*Debbie Nicol, managing director of the Dubai-based business en motion, is a consultant on leadership and organisational development, strategic change and corporate culture.*

[business@thenational.ae](mailto:business@thenational.ae)

Follow The National’s Business section on [Twitter](#)



**Add your comment** | **View all comments**

---

## **Related**

The likeability link to good leadership

A leader’s physical presence will make the difference

Qualities that earn leaders high accolades

Survival boot camp puts leaders to the test

## More The Life



Off hours:  
Danube Group  
director works  
hard, plays harder  
in Dubai



Stay grounded  
with this rare  
Dubai Marina  
duplex



Why VAT can be  
good for the UAE  
and its bevy of  
SMEs



Rare low-rise  
Dubai Marina  
duplex at Dh4.3m  
has a homely feel  
– in pictures

## MOST VIEWED

**BUSINESS** | ALL

**1.** Rare low-rise Dubai Marina duplex at Dh4.3m has a homely feel – in pictures

**2.** Secret Opec talks that raised oil price - will it happen again?

**3.** Gone fishing: Delta CEO and vocal critic of Emirates, Etihad steps down

**4.** Middle East carriers surpass North America airlines in market share

**5.** Why VAT can be good for the UAE and its bevy of SMEs

**6.** China, Platts and the unprecedented oil trading debate

**7.** Kuwait Airways retires 1,350 Kuwaiti nationals, targets profitability

**8.** Lower oil prices hit UAE and Saudi Arabia economies, latest PMI survey shows

**9.** UAE expats and the reality of planning for a longer retirement

**10.** World will avoid financial crisis repeat insists Societe Generale global strategist

[More Most Viewed](#)



Trade FX & CFDs  
from a single  
MT4 account

[OPEN AN ACCOUNT](#)

---

## EDITOR'S PICKS

The ten big  
burning legal  
questions of The  
Address

Downtown Dubai  
fire



UAE salary guide  
2016: How much  
you can expect to  
earn in finance,  
technology, HR  
and admin



Where Dubai rents  
have risen and  
fallen, Q3 2015 –  
in pictures



Where Abu Dhabi  
rents have risen  
and fallen, Q3  
2015 – in pictures



---

## FOLLOW US



Tweets

Follow

Expand



**The National**  
@TheNationalUAE

2h

Middle East carriers surpass North America airlines in market share [news.ae/1X7sNPi](https://news.ae/1X7sNPi)  
[pic.twitter.com/sER9Dopodm](https://pic.twitter.com/sER9Dopodm)



Expand



**The National**  
@TheNationalUAE

2h

China, Platts and the unprecedented oil trading debate [news.ae/1Ksaxyi](https://news.ae/1Ksaxyi)  
[pic.twitter.com/gcQciMpUk5](https://pic.twitter.com/gcQciMpUk5)



Tweet to @TheNationalUAE

## SPOTLIGHT



Secret Opec talks that raised oil price - will it happen again?

---

Traps set to catch rabbits running  
amok on Palm Jumeirah