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## Breaking Through Resistance to Foster Effective Creativity

### ***“Resistance is Futile”, The Borg, Star Trek Next Generation circa 1990.***

I recently finished reading an outstanding book called “The War of Art” by Steven Pressfield. If you don’t immediately recognize his name, let me share that he is an accomplished writer with titles such as *Last of the Amazons* and *The Legend of Bagger Vance* to his credit. The War of Art is a sharply focused read and generally directed to those that pursue art in all its forms. His main point is that most “artists” are essentially amateurs, who pursue their passions if and when their muse appears. By contrast, the professional does not wait for the muse; the professional puts in the work, is dedicated to work regardless of the circumstances and magically the muse shows up. And what the professional does that the amateur cannot is effective battle and win against ... Resistance.

Pressfield describes Resistance as if it is a metaphysical thing, almost as if it is a spectre that is constantly working to thwart all your best efforts to be creative. While his book is focused on the creativity of the arts, let’s substitute that our efforts to get creative as financial institutions is the “work” that he says must be conducted as a professional. Our pressing to get creative, to foster thinking and ultimately yield true innovation is what Resistance will work aggressively to counter. In the furtherance of that goal, Pressfield gives Resistance the following attributes:

- Resistance ...
  - Is Invisible – can’t be seen, touched or smelled but it can be felt
  - Is Internal – it is self-perpetuated and self-generated. It is the enemy within
  - Is Insidious – it will tell you anything to keep you from “doing your work”
  - Is Implacable – It’s like the Terminator or the creature from *Alien*, it cannot be reasoned with
  - Is Impersonal – it doesn’t know or care who you are. It’s a force of nature and acts objectively
  - Is Infallible – The stronger that Resistance is at work, the more important is the outcome we are trying to achieve
  - Is Universal – Everyone experiences Resistance
  - Never Sleeps – The fight against Resistance begins anew each and every day
  - Plays for Keeps – Resistance is not interested in wounds or injury – it seeks to kill
  - Is Most Powerful at the Finish Line – as the finish line gets into sight, Resistance ramps up the pressure on us to quit
  - Recruits Allies – it actively solicits sabotage by others ... family, friends, tradition, peer pressure,
  - Fueled by Fear – It has no strength of its own; we feed it with the power of fear

Interesting list, don't you think? If you read my recent blog post on failure, [One Word to Enable Innovation](#), you'll know that my thinking is that fear of failure is the largest issue a financial institution must overcome if they want to truly become innovative. But the long list of attributes above identify Resistance as the embodiment of the mountain we must overcome to achieve even the smallest of innovation gains. The tools and tricks that Resistance uses to keep us from making any progress include procrastination, self-doubt, which leads to self-editing, concern about what others will think, social mores and corporate decorum.

There is so much I could detail about the book but I'll just highlight one specific area - how Pressfield educates about Resistance and Fear. Being fearless is not always a great attribute, it can get us into a lot of trouble. But allowing fear to ground us into inertia is equally bad. Fear is what allows us to be cautious about experiencing a bear when we are hiking. But fear can disable our ability to remediate the situation if we walk into a clearing and there is a mother bear with 2 cubs across the field. Shouting at the bear (or really making any noise) is not a good idea if we haven't been spotted. If we overcome our initial urge to react, we can respond by quietly backing out of the clearing and walk around. Pressfield states that if we are fearful about our work, then we need to realize that is good. Fear is a barometer for us of what is worth pursuing. Our fear is pointing to the importance of that activity; if it meant nothing to us, Resistance in the form of fear would not press so hard against it.

So what can we do to overcome Resistance and achieve the needed goals of getting creative and achieving meaningful innovations? By taking on the attitude of the professional. Pressfield speaks to this concept of being a "professional". I'll summarize his thoughts to this one concept: the professional is committed full-time. Our goals of creativity and innovation cannot be an avocation, it must be our vocation, so important that we would not allow anything to stop us from achieving it. And Resistance hates it when we "turn pro". So if you are open to going pro on creativity and innovation, what are the attributes of the Professional?

➤ The Professional:

- Is Patient – to persevere through adversity and stay the course, not giving up
- Seeks Order – Remains focused and avoids chaos
- Demystifies – Avoids over-glorification of the process, a pro just executes
- Acts in the Face of Fear – Don't wait to overcome fear, proceed! Work! Then fear fades away ...
- Accepts No Excuses – Doesn't allow Resistance to get even small victories (i.e.: "You don't have to be creative today, there will be more time tomorrow ...")
- Is Prepared – Accepts that Resistance will press and is mentally ready to do battle
- Does Not Show Off – It is not necessary to draw attention to our efforts, a pro just executes
- Masters Techniques – Tried and true techniques give us a blueprint for execution
- Does Not Hesitate to Ask for Help – Even the greatest athletes and actors all have coaches
- Does not Take Failure Personally – The Professional is tough-minded, and assesses work objectively, regardless of criticism or praise.

Is it possible that financial institutions could take up the mantle of encouraging all of our employees to take the attitude of the professional to being creative and ultimately innovative? It could absolutely happen. But the attitude of going all in on innovation must begin at the top and be consistently applied throughout the organization. And then persist, press on hard to overcome Resistance. Because if your organization goes pro on innovation, then Resistance will rise up to quench any innovation that might spark.

I've already spoken about the fear of failure. But perhaps an even greater fear is the fear of success. We are "comfortable" with the operation of our organizations and perhaps, deep down in our core, we really don't

want to innovate. We become different, not like the rest of our peers. We might lose some friendships along the journey. And ultimately we must live up to the newly emergent innovative organization. It's much easier to just sit back and let innovation pass us by. Then Resistance leaves us alone as we are not challenging the status quo. To that I would simply offer up a quote from the great American, Theodore Roosevelt:

**“In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing”**

We cannot afford to do nothing. Make it a point in your upcoming strategic planning sessions to make creativity and innovation a priority for your institution. It's time to go pro ...

Footnote: My sister Linda Baskin is a relatively new professional artist (Bodazzastudios.com) and she sent me this book. We talk often about creativity and innovation and this book was a great kick in the pants for me. I encourage you to get and read Steven Pressfields excellent book, The War of Art at

[https://www.amazon.com/War-Art-Through-Creative-Battles/dp/1936891026/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=3UVFHP2B9POLX&keywords=war+of+art+steven+pressfield&qid=1651093503&srefix=war+of+art%2Caps%2C534&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/War-Art-Through-Creative-Battles/dp/1936891026/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3UVFHP2B9POLX&keywords=war+of+art+steven+pressfield&qid=1651093503&srefix=war+of+art%2Caps%2C534&sr=8-1)