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For many of us the question, *How do we get buy-in?* carries an inherent sense of doubt, frustration and futility in its asking. Why?

Approaching decision-makers while seeing ourselves as on-the-outside-trying-to-get-in is a competitive frame of reference: our agenda versus theirs, our sense of urgency versus theirs, and often our values versus theirs. When we define a relationship in this way we are creating the very resistance we wish to avoid. We don't intend to be competitive, but what other choice is there?

A few years ago I secured an interview with the CEO of a medical services organization who had just been promoted after ten years in the CFO position. Charged by the Board to bring the organization back to profitability, John had inherited a leadership team of nine individuals, most of whom had been in their positions during the slide into their financial crisis. I had been warned that the organization had no money to spend on anything non-essential, and certainly not the diversity training that the referring colleague had experienced with us.

"Let me ask you a question, John. At what percentage of their potential would you say your leadership team is operating right now?"

"I'd say about 50%," he replied.

"What exactly would it look like if you all were at 100%? What would folks be doing that they are not doing now?"

He answered quickly. "They would be out in front of the plan, taking the initiative, making judgments based on their experience, making recommendations to me about how to accomplish our objectives and communicating effectively and often with me and each other. They would be working things out with each other instead of bringing most of the issues back to the leadership team."

"Wow," I said. "You have obviously been thinking about this one. And what then would be the value to the organization if they were working at the full potential you described?"

"Three-quarters of a million," he said immediately.

I was visibly surprised. "How is it that you know so precisely how much you would gain?" I asked.

"The core service operation is almost \$1,500,000 in the red right now, and the turnaround plan will take two years as it is. If they were at full potential I am certain we could turn this ship around in half the time," he said emphatically.

"We can do that for you, John," I said. And we did.

But here is the interesting part: After a series of leadership trainings in pursuit of our agreed goals, THEY REQUESTED DIVERSITY TRAINING FROM US! Why? Because we were working from the Inside/Out.

We taught the team how to resolve conflicts, how to conduct dialogues on previously taboo topics, how to set up a culture of safety and confidentiality, how to diagnose complex problems and define effective strategies to accomplish their goals, how to genuinely empower themselves and their reports, how to tailor communication and motivation strategies to fit different audiences and cultural groups, and much more, all core components of our inclusive diversity trainings.

It was not difficult to fulfill our promise of results because the skills required to succeed at challenging racism are more than adequate to tackle other complex organizational problems. We simply employed them in the service of other challenges first, in order to work from the Inside/Out. And, later, when the topic was explicitly about developing cultural competency, folks realized they had already learned over 50% of what we would have taught them in an off-the-shelf diversity training.

What can you do?

1. Start by redefining resistance. Try on thinking of the decision-makers not as being opposed to diversity, but rather as being deeply invested in something else that you have not yet fully appreciated.
2. Choose a diversity consulting firm that will support this approach, and
3. Involve them as early as possible in order to
4. Discover the organizational challenge that inclusive diversity skill training will be sure to impact, and then
5. Deliver the specified results, utilizing the selected theory and skills.

When decision-makers regard internal advocates and diversity consultants as strategic partners because they experience us as fully invested in solving their problems, then we are working from the Inside/Out.