

Working with Objections

Question

*How do I move ahead if a partner agency has reservations?
What if I think their objections are irrational?*



Key Message

The single most important talent in providing any professional advisory service is the ability to **understand the 'buy in' process from the partner agency's perspective**. Forming a partnership is rarely a 100% comfortable experience and you may, at times, even feel unwelcome or unfairly excluded or criticised. You should **expect some objections** and recognise that, sometimes, an objection may be couched in **irrational or unreasonable** terms.

Part A – Listening for Objections

If we listen carefully to a partner's words, we can sometimes discern some of the following *underlying* objections. Please recall that *objections are the most useful indicator of how well our Trusted Adviser relationship is going*. Use this template to recognise feelings at the root of the objections you hear:



Feeling	Rationale
I'm feeling threatened	<i>This is our area of responsibility, not yours. Even though I know I need GP expertise and resources, emotionally it's not comfortable to tell you that we need help.</i>
I'm taking a personal risk	<i>By putting some of our affairs in the hands of others, I risk losing control. We're a big fish in a small pond and you might reduce our influence.</i>
I'm worried	<i>Your recommendations might imply that we're not up to the mark, or we would have put something in place already. Are you people really going to be on my side?</i>
I'm exposed	<i>I may have to reveal some 'secrets' about our operations, not all of which are flattering. I'm feeling ignorant and I'm not used to this! I wish I knew more about this specific area and I don't even know the scope and complexity of this.</i>
I'm sceptical	<i>I've done these sorts of things before and I've been burned. You get lots of promises – how do I know if they're realistic? I don't trust the skills of these people.</i>
I'm concerned	<i>They either won't – or can't – understand my real priorities. They'll try to sell me a program that the government – or GPs – are pushing, rather than something that will really help our organization and our client group.</i>
I'm suspicious	<i>Is this another plan to 'dumb down' high quality care? Is this just a way to erode genuine health care, masquerading as the latest 'health promotion' or 'prevention' initiative? What's the real benefit to patients?</i>

Part B – Responding to Objections

Usually behind these feelings lies a positive intent, tied to a specific belief. As a Trusted Adviser, your best course of action is *not to challenge their belief, but work with it*. Use the template below to identify which of the 6 Beliefs your negotiating counterpart holds and plan responses that *meet the criteria of this belief set*.

Partner Agency's Mindset			Useful Trusted Adviser Response
Belief	Positive Intent	Underlying concern	
"We like to do things hassle-free"	Ease	<i>What you are suggesting sounds complicated</i>	<i>This program. . .</i> <i>This initiative . . .</i> <i>make things easier by . . .</i> <i>creates stability and comfort for people in that . . .</i> <i>helps the smooth running of . . .</i>
"We've always done it this way"	Tradition	<i>What you are suggesting demands that we change</i>	<i>is an enhancement of the traditional way of . . .</i> <i>fits neatly with your existing approaches by . . .</i> <i>mirrors what you're doing right now in that . . .</i> <i>anchors to your current and well-tested methods of . . .</i>
"I'm in charge and I know exactly what I'm doing"	Expertise	<i>What you are suggesting is not my idea</i>	<i>You're the best person to judge the value of . . .</i> <i>Your expertise in the area of XXX is well recognised . . .</i> <i>You've fostered some excellent initiatives already and I'm wondering if . . .</i> <i>You're recognised as a leader in XXX and many people would look to your agency as a model for . . .</i>
"We must feel certain that something's going to succeed"	Procedure	<i>What you are suggesting is not sufficiently proven</i>	<i>has solid procedures built in to ensure</i> <i>relies on proven results from XXX and has demonstrated excellent outcomes in XXX</i> <i>has a sequence of checks and balances which provides an 'insurance policy' in the form of . . .</i> <i>requires few changes and no additional resources</i> <i>is evolutionary not revolutionary; we'd take it one step at a time</i>
"We pride ourselves on using best-practice methods"	Competition	<i>What you are suggesting is something we already know / do</i>	<i>is an extension of the best-practice methods you're already using</i> <i>builds on the innovative practices you're already working with and lifts your profile by . . .</i> <i>helps you really lead the way . . .</i>
"The most important thing to us is quality health outcomes"	Community	<i>What you are suggesting is an economic/policy priority, not a care priority</i>	<i>is community-focussed in that . . .</i> <i>is built strongly upon patient outcomes such as . . .</i> <i>helps you direct more time and effort towards patients, for example . . .</i>

If you are unsure which beliefs a partner agency representative holds, you can cycle through several, to cover all bases. Similarly, even if you hear NO objections, you can use the Trusted Adviser responses to build enhanced trust.