

## **Acknowledge that Your Opponents Are Right to Oppose You**

When your project's business case for your stakeholders is weak, you need to acknowledge that it is weak – that is, you need to acknowledge that your opponents are right when they claim the project as currently framed poses more risks and costs for them than benefits.

Some years ago I was working with a power company trying to build a wind farm near a pleasant and fairly affluent small town in the western United States. A wind farm is a classic example of the sort of locally unwanted land use (LULU) that arouses rational “not in my back yard” opposition. From a global, national, and regional perspective, wind farms are wonderful; they're a clean source of electricity, environmentally far superior to fossil fuel power plants. But wind farms are rotten neighbors. They're ugly, they're noisy, and they come with transmission lines attached (or what's the point?). Everybody's better off with more wind power in our energy future, and everybody's better off if the source of that wind power is in somebody else's back yard.

Ignoring all this, my client had been feigning surprise at the local opposition. “We don't understand how anybody could object to making progress in this essential transition from fossil fuels to wind energy,” my client kept saying – as if the proposal were a picturesque Dutch antique tucked away in a corner instead of a forest of high-tech turbines dominating the landscape; and as if the community were a gang of global warming deniers instead of solid citizens trying to protect their neighborhood's lifestyle and property values.

This approach literally adds insult to injury. It adds the outrage of dishonest disrespect to the substantive downsides of the wind farm itself.

It's not as if the company stood a chance of persuading the opponents that their opposition was foolish, that a wind farm would be a good thing for the neighborhood. If you think you can hoodwink people into misperceiving their own self-interest, you're welcome to try (though it's a horribly disrespectful thing to do, and I'm not interested in helping). But in decades of outrage management consulting, I have very rarely seen it work. And the cost of trying is a whole lot of additional outrage.

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